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SOUTH AFRICAN INTERVENTION IN THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR, 1975-1976: MOTIVATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

BY

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**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree
of Master of Arts in Historical Studies**

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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ABSTRACT

Between 1975-1976 South Africa intervened in the Angolan civil war. The invasion of a black African country was then an unprecedented event in South Africa's history. This dissertation explores the motivations behind, and implications of, South Africa's involvement in Angola. It firstly scrutinises the rationalisations given by the government of the day, specifically the four key objectives that the Defence Force claimed it had been pursuing. These were: the protection of South Africa's investment in the Cunene hydroelectric scheme; the 'hot pursuit' of Namibian guerrillas; the response to appeals from two of the liberation movements in Angola; and finally, the need to counter communist, specifically Cuban, intervention in Angola.

Consideration is then given to the key motivation behind South Africa's invasion of Angola, one which the South African government initially tried to conceal. Operation Savannah, as South Africa's intervention in Angola was officially known, was a response to actual and perceived encouragement from both black African states and the West. Intervention in Angola was seen as an opportunity to act in concert with moderate black Africa and to prove that South Africa was a reliable ally against communist expansion. It was also an effort to establish South Africa's credibility as a loyal ally of the 'Free World'. This exploration is revealing as to both Pretoria's worldview and its perception of its own international standing.

Although there is extensive scholarship of the Angolan civil war and South Africa's intervention therein, little has been written about the domestic context of the war for South Africa itself. This dissertation examines the implications of the South African intervention in Angola from the South African perspective. The ramifications for South Africa, both in the domestic sphere and the international arena, are outlined. South Africa's intervention in Angola led to international recriminations and increased isolation for South Africa. Within South Africa itself there was a stark contrast in the reaction of the white and black communities to events in Angola. In the regional context, South Africa's actions led to deterioration in its security situation, as a consequence of the continued Cuban presence in Angola and the escalation of SWAPO activity in Namibia.

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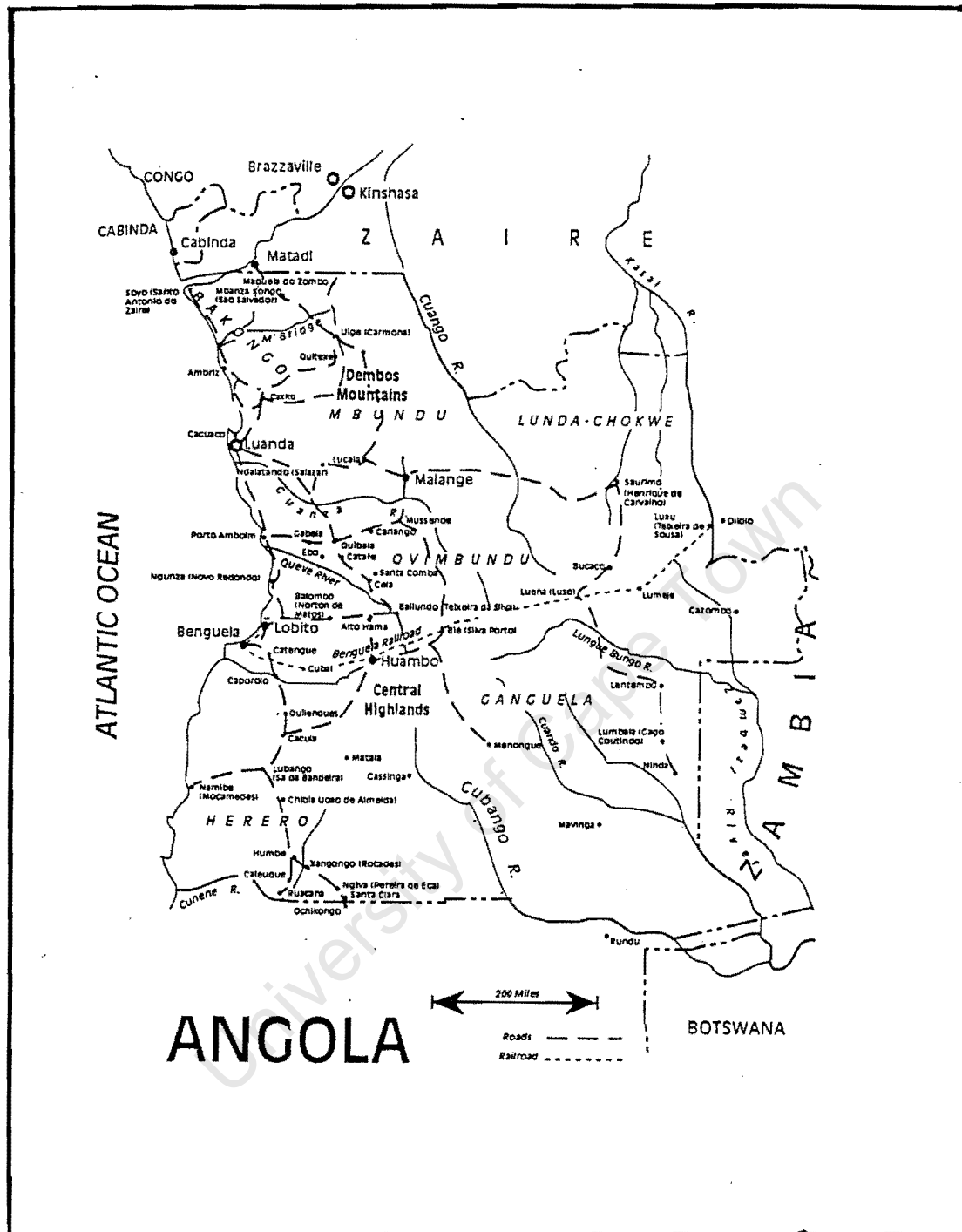


Figure 1: Map of Angola

[Taken from D. Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention: From Local Bush War to Chronic Crisis in Southern Africa* (McFarland & Company, Jefferson, North Carolina, 1993), p. xvii]

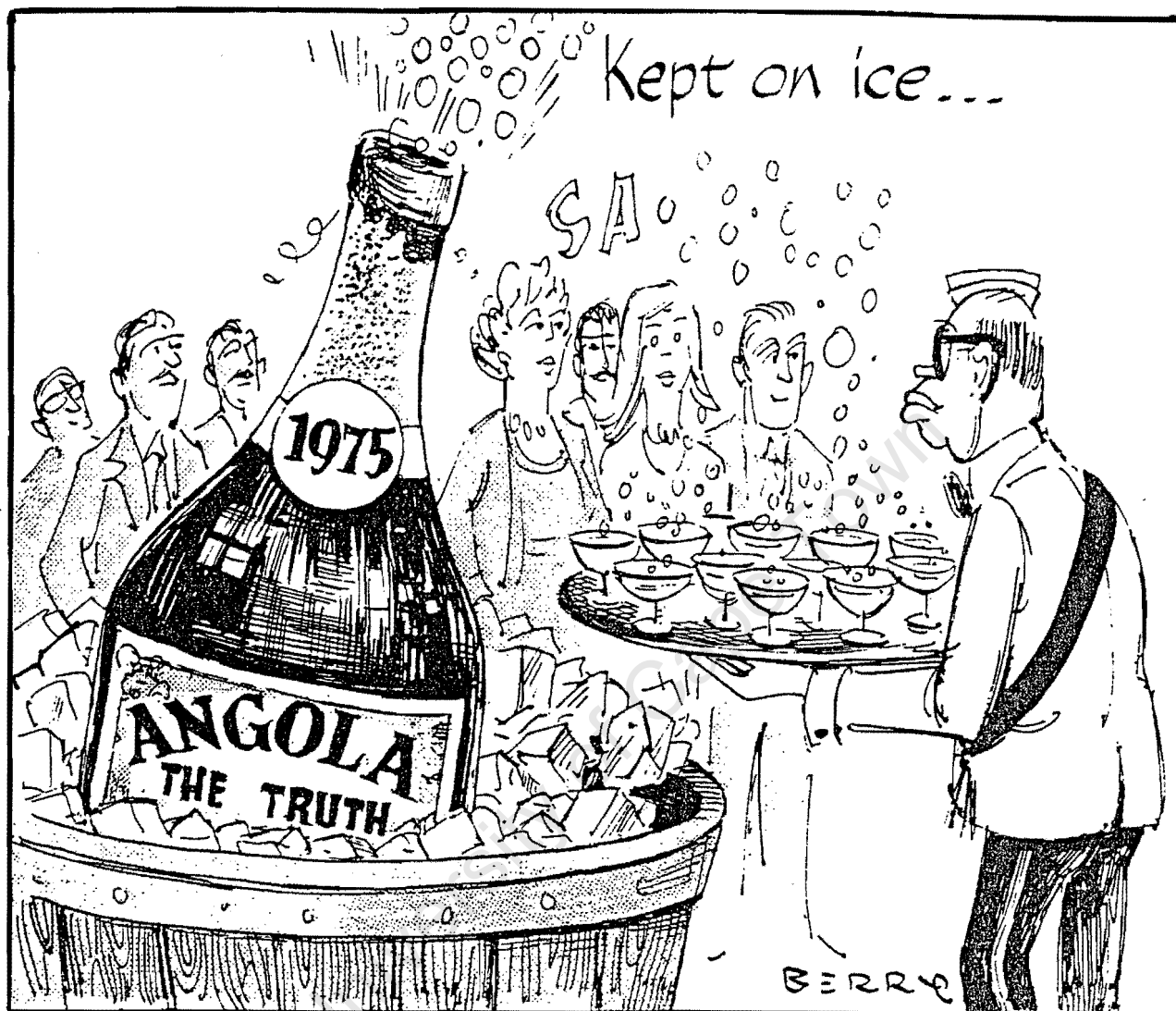


Figure 2: In 1975, the Defence Force covertly invaded Angola and Prime Minister Vorster tried to keep the fact secret from South Africa.

[A. Berry, *Act by Act: 40 Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa, A Cartoon History of Apartheid* (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1989), p. 62]

INTRODUCTION

‘In all history there cannot be many instances of a country going into a foreign war without the knowledge of its people’.
(Allister Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, 1990)¹

In 1975, South Africa covertly invaded Angola and its troops advanced to within two hundred kilometres of Luanda.² Although evidence of South African intervention in the Angolan civil war was published in the international press, Prime Minister B.J. Vorster tried to keep the fact secret from South Africa. ‘Operation Savannah’, as the intervention was officially known, was the first occasion since the Second World War that South African soldiers were sent to fight and died outside their country’s borders.³ Also, for the first time in modern South African history, white soldiers found themselves as prisoners of war in black African hands. As the ‘Angolan’ origins of the civil war became subsumed by its Cold War context, the escalation of Cuban and Soviet intervention and the end of American involvement led the South African Defence Force to retreat in early 1976.

The Angolan civil war has been examined as a Cold War case study, and the chronology of super-power escalation has been endlessly revised. However, little has been written about the domestic context of the war within South Africa itself. This dissertation seeks to examine the South African intervention in Angola from the South African perspective. It aims to place the military episode within its broader context of both domestic developments within South Africa and the country’s position on the world stage. It outlines ‘what’ happened and ‘when’, but also seeks to examine ‘why’ and ‘with what implications.’

South Africa’s military intervention on foreign soil, although a regular event by the 1980s, was extraordinary in 1975. It appeared that Pretoria had learnt to live with the FRELIMO government in Mozambique and come to accept the inevitability of majority rule in Rhodesia. Why then, in Angola, did Vorster abandon his government’s oft-quoted principle of non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states?

When writing about South Africa during the apartheid era it is necessary to employ the racial terminology commonly used at the time. Although classification of this kind is found objectionable by many, including this author, in the interests of accuracy terms such as ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘coloured’ cannot be avoided.

In this dissertation South West Africa is referred to as Namibia (a name recognised by the United Nations from 1966) but ‘Rhodesia’ is retained for Zimbabwe during the period before 1980. The Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly known as Zaire and previously the Belgian Congo, is referred to here as Zaire. ‘Congo’ refers to Congo-Brazzaville, formerly the French Congo.

¹ A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Heinemann, London, 1990), p. 305.

² A small number of South African instructors/advisers got within 25 kilometres of Luanda.

³ Volunteers from the South African Air Force had participated in the Berlin Airbridge and with the United Nations forces in the Korean War, but no ground troops were involved in either episode.

Consideration will be given to the ramifications for South Africa, both in the domestic sphere and the international arena. In South Africa the defenders of apartheid had three major fears: the advance of communist powers to positions of influence in countries neighbouring South Africa, the further decline of Western support for South Africa and the growth of international black unrest in support of a liberation struggle. Pretoria's intervention in the Angolan civil war led to a deterioration on all three fronts.

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HISTORIOGRAPHY

The official archives of the South African Defence Force (SADF) relating to this period are theoretically declassified, the 20-year restriction on them having lapsed. However, as the files on Operation Savannah were originally classified as 'secret', research applications are still subject to approval by the National Defence Force's Intelligence Division.⁴ Even the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was unable to gain access to them.⁵ According to a SADF researcher, due to the secret nature of the operation itself, there is not as much documentation in the archives as would be expected.⁶

Two official sources are readily available. The first is a Defence Force press release entitled '*Nature and Extent of the SADF's Involvement in the Angolan Conflict*', which was issued by Defence Headquarters in Pretoria on 3 February 1977.⁷ Prior to this rather sketchy account, the South African public had been given very little information about the government's activities in Angola. The second official source is *Operasie Savannah, Angola 1975-1976* by Prof. F.J. du Toit Spies and Commandant Sophia J. Du Preez.⁸ This is a more comprehensive narrative, which resulted from a Defence Force Archives project to document several major SADF operations. Spies, a retired history professor, was commissioned to write the official account of Operation Savannah in 1978. He was provided with access to classified archives and the assistance of Du Preez and other researchers from the SADF's Documentation Service.⁹

The South African government's continued reticence on the nature and extent of its involvement in the Angolan civil war meant Spies' manuscript was not published until 1989, almost a decade after its completion. During this time it was not even available to other historians commissioned by the Defence Force¹⁰ and the version that was finally published by the SADF's Department of Public Relations was heavily edited.¹¹ It is a rather clinical description of the sequence of battles in Angola, and deals only superficially with the political and diplomatic intrigues surrounding the campaign and the way in which the South African public was misled. An English version was not made available.

⁴ Correspondence with the South African National Defence Force archives, Pretoria.

⁵ Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report, Vol.2, Chapter 2: The State Outside South Africa between 1960-1990* (internet published), section 15.

⁶ S. du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola: Die Verhaal van Suid-Afrika se Soldate in Angola, 1975-76* (J.L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1989), foreword.

⁷ The press release was reproduced in several South African newspapers including *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 February 1977.

⁸ F.J. du Toit Spies & S. du Preez, *Operasie Savannah, Angola 1975-1976* (S.A. Weermag Direktooraat Openbare Betrekinge, Pretoria, 1989).

⁹ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, inside front cover; K. Meiring, 'Operasie Savannah 1975-1976, F.J. du Toit Spies en S.J. du Preez, boekresensie', (*Historia*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1992), p. 110.

¹⁰ A. Van Wyk, *The Birth of a New Afrikaner* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, Johannesburg, 1991), p. 94. Van Wyk wrote two books on the recipients of the Honoris Crux, South Africa's highest military decoration for bravery, (published in 1982 and 1985). Despite having the 'cooperation' of the SADF he was given no access to official files, including Spies' manuscript.

Du Preez's own book, *Avontuur in Angola: Die Verhaal van Suid-Afrika se Soldate in Angola, 1975-76* (Adventure in Angola: The Story of South Africa's Soldiers in Angola) also appeared in 1989. She drew on the same documentation as that used by Spies but sought 'to strongly place the soldiers' experience of events in Operation Savannah under the spotlight', a facet lacking from Spies' account.¹² The following year, Du Preez prepared an operational diary from the war for publication in *Militaria*, the SADF's 'professional' publication.¹³ Peter Stiff, whose book *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations 1969-94* includes a chapter on Operation Savannah, was assisted by Du Preez who he claims was the foremost expert on the operation but 'for reasons of gender was prevented from writing the SADF's official history'.¹⁴

Following the outbreak of the Angolan civil war in 1974-1975 a number of commentators sought to unearth the complexities of the conflict, particularly the intrigues of its Cold War context and internationalisation. Among the most prolific of these were Tony Hodges, who reported from Angola during the war, and the veteran Africa observer Colin Legum, who sought to unravel the complexities of South Africa's intervention, which he described as 'possibly the most traumatic event in South Africa's history since the Anglo-Boer war'.¹⁵

The first personal recollection of the Angolan war was *Adeus Angola* published by Willem Steenkamp in late 1976.¹⁶ Steenkamp, the *Cape Times*' military correspondent, served in Angola between January and March 1976 as a Citizen Force¹⁷ intelligence officer with the Cape Town Highlanders. Steenkamp fully supported South African intervention in Angola to counter what he described as 'a simple, straight-forward communist land-grab'.¹⁸ *Adeus Angola* was a highly personalised series of vignettes with no place names, dates or details of campaign movements. It was cleared for publication by the SADF with very little edited out.¹⁹ At the time the South African public's knowledge of Operation Savannah was restricted to rumours,

¹¹ Correspondence with Ian van der Waag, Department of Military History, University of Stellenbosch.

¹² Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, foreword; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 305.

¹³ J. Laubscher & S. du Preez, 'Operasie Savannah Dagboek van Kapt J.A. Laubscher, annotated and edited by Commandant Sophia du Preez', (*Militaria*, 1990, Vol. 20, No. 2).

¹⁴ P. Stiff, *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations 1969-94* (Galago, Alberton, South Africa, 1999), acknowledgements page.

¹⁵ Quote from C. Legum & T. Hodges, *After Angola: The War Over Southern Africa* (Rex Collings, London, 1976), p. 35. See also Legum (ed.): *African Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents, 1975-76* (Rex Collings, London, Vol. 8, 1976); *African Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents, 1976-77* (Rex Collings, London, Vol. 9, 1977); T. Hodges, 'The Struggle for Angola: How the World Powers Entered a War in Africa', (*The Round Table*, No. 262, April 1976).

¹⁶ W. Steenkamp, *Adeus Angola* (Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1976).

¹⁷ The SADF was made up of the 'full time' Permanent Force of career soldiers, National Servicemen doing military service, and the 'part time' Citizen Force units called up for varying periods each year.

¹⁸ Steenkamp, *Adeus Angola*, p. 137.

¹⁹ Interview with Willem Steenkamp. Steenkamp claimed he knew of two other manuscripts that the military had flatly allowed to be published.

vague official statements and one television film. Consequently *Adeus Angola* sold very well. Steenkamp was on good terms with the Defence Force and published two further pro-SADF books on the border war, *Borderstrike!: South Africa into Angola*²⁰ and *South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989*.²¹

Another South African defence reporter, A.J. Venter, produced a book early in 1977. *Vorster's Africa: Friendship and Frustration* included a chapter on the Angolan war.²² Although Venter had travelled in Angola during the war and had reported from the front²³, his book does not describe any actual engagements. Despite being vetted by the military authorities, his Angolan chapter angered General Hendrik van den Bergh, of the Bureau of State Security, who claimed Venter had disclosed 'privileged' information.²⁴

It is likely that the SADF released their February 1977 account to coincide with a series of four articles published in the London *Sunday Telegraph*.²⁵ They were the result of an investigation by Robert Moss, an Australian journalist based in London. Moss was the spokesman for the right-wing National Association for Freedom and author of Margaret Thatcher's 'Iron Maiden' speech. Moss was unremitting in his praise of South Africa's involvement in Angola and critical of 'the failure of nerve in Washington', which allowed the communists a 'victory by default'.²⁶ Despite, or perhaps because of his alleged intelligence contacts²⁷, Moss was far from convincing on the nature of the American involvement in Angola and the diplomatic complexities of the crisis. His articles were syndicated in South African newspapers beginning on 4 February, the day after the official SADF press release on Operation Savannah. The two accounts were very similar and the fact that the Defence Force allowed Moss' to be published in South Africa implies a certain level of cooperation.²⁸

Moss' articles were themselves an attempt to counter claims about the Cuban engagement in Angola, made by the Colombian novelist, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Marquez's authorised and somewhat sensationalised account of the Cuban 'Operation Carlota' was first published in the Mexican weekly magazine, *Proceso*, in

²⁰ W. Steenkamp, *Borderstrike!: South Africa into Angola* (Butterworths Publishers, Durban, 1983).

²¹ W. Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War, 1966-1989* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1989).

²² A.J. Venter, *Vorster's Africa: Friendship and Frustration* (Ernest Stanton Publishers, Johannesburg, 1977).

²³ After Venter's South African nationality was disclosed to the MPLA he moved out of the MPLA sphere of influence to Nova Lisboa and covered the war from the UNITA side: Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, p. 201.

²⁴ G. Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression* (MA Thesis, Journalism, Rhodes University, 1980), p. 252 fn.52.

²⁵ R. Moss, 'Castro's Secret War Exposed', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January, 6 February, 13 February and 20 February 1977.

²⁶ Moss, 'How Washington Lost its Nerve and how the Cubans Subdued Angola', *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977.

²⁷ J. Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media, 1972-79: A Struggle for Representation* (Frank Cass, London, 2000), pp. 136, 153-154 fn.8.

²⁸ It has been claimed that Moss' account was written with the assistance of the SADF: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 48.

January 1977 and then in translation by American newspapers.²⁹ R.W. Johnson's *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*³⁰ appeared soon after Marquez's account, which it closely followed. It was a highly readable examination of South Africa's international standing which devoted considerable, though necessarily speculative, attention to the Angolan civil war. The following year, Robin Hallett, a lecturer at the University of Cape Town attempted the first academic study of South Africa's participation in the Angolan war. It was an attempt to dispel what he described as 'an official smoke screen, a deliberately created miasma, the product partly of stringent censorship, partly of government denials – or, to put the matter more bluntly and starkly, simple lies'.³¹

The most important published memoir of the Angolan war was that of John Stockwell, who headed the United States' Central Intelligence Agency's Angolan task force. Rumours of CIA involvement in Angola had appeared repeatedly in the Western media but were not confirmed until 10 April 1977, when an open letter from Stockwell was published in the *Washington Post*. Stockwell had resigned from the CIA deeply disillusioned and in May 1978 published his exposé *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*.³² Over the last quarter-century other memoirs have been published which are pertinent to the study of Operation Savannah. Accounts of the United States involvement in Angola are included in the memoirs of: President Gerald Ford³³, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger³⁴, Director of Central Intelligence William Colby³⁵, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Nathaniel Davis³⁶ Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under Ronald Reagan³⁷ and William Hyland, Ford's deputy assistant for national security affairs³⁸.

South African memoirs include volumes by military men: Jan Breytenbach³⁹ and Johannes (Jannie) Geldenhuys⁴⁰, and Opposition politicians Sir De Villiers Graaff⁴¹ and Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert⁴². Neither

²⁹ G.G. Marquez, 'Operation Carlota', (*Proceso*, January 1977). Translated extracts were serialised as 'Cuba in Africa: Seed Che Guevara Planted', (*Washington Post*, 10-12 January 1977). The *New Left Review* (No. 101-102, February-April 1977) published the translated article in full.

³⁰ R.W. Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?* (Macmillan, Johannesburg, 1977).

³¹ R. Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola, 1975-76', (*African Affairs*, Vol. 77, No. 308, July 1978), p. 347.

³² J. Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1978).

³³ G. Ford, *A Time to Heal* (W.H. Allen, London, 1979).

³⁴ H. Kissinger, *Years of Renewal* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1999).

³⁵ W. Colby, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1978).

³⁶ N. Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975: A Personal Memoir', (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 57, No. 1, Fall 1978).

³⁷ C. Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa: Making Peace in a Rough Neighbourhood* (W.W. Norton, New York, 1992).

³⁸ W. Hyland, *Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations from Nixon to Reagan* (Random House, New York, 1987).

³⁹ J. Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle* (Saayman & Weber, Cape Town, 1986); *They Live by the Sword: 32 'Buffalo' Battalion - South Africa's Foreign Legion* (Lemur Books, Alberton, South Africa, 1990).

⁴⁰ J. Geldenhuys, *A General's Story: From an Era of War and Peace* (Jonathan Ball, Johannesburg, 1995).

Prime Minister Vorster nor Minister of Defence (and later prime minister) P.W. Botha wrote autobiographies. However, Botha does have two 'official' biographies, which were written at his request.⁴³ As perhaps would be expected, the most prolific writers of memoirs are journalists from the period. Important accounts, by foreign correspondents who covered the war in Angola, are by Ryszard Kapuściński⁴⁴ and Fred Bridgland.⁴⁵ Those which give insights into the domestic context of South Africa's Angolan episode include: Allister Sparks⁴⁶, Benjamin Pogrund⁴⁷, Donald Woods⁴⁸, Anthony Heard⁴⁹, Harvey Tyson⁵⁰ and Gerald Shaw⁵¹. Apart from Steenkamp's *Adeus Angola*, only two other accounts of Operation Savannah by ordinary soldiers have been published: a narrative by 'Cobus' a Citizen Force soldier called up to serve in Angola included in a compilation of memoirs by South African veterans⁵², and a chapter in *Parabat: Personal Accounts of Paratroopers in Combat Situations in South Africa's History* which describes the experiences of Sergeant-Major Erwin.⁵³

Two recent South African books are of particular note. The first is *The Silent War: South African Recce Operations 1969-94* by Peter Stiff. In 1987 the SADF agreed to give Stiff unprecedented access to documents covering the activities of the Reconnaissance Commandoes (Recces). However, this ended in 1989 as a result, Stiff believes, of opposition from the National Intelligence Service, and he did not resume his research into apartheid's covert military operations until after 1994.⁵⁴ In response to submissions to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission about the activities of the former SADF, Hilton Hamann produced a

⁴¹ D.V. Graaff, *Div Looks Back: The Memoirs of Sir De Villiers Graaff* (Human & Rousseau, Cape Town, 1993).

⁴² F. Van Zyl Slabbert, *Tough Choices: Reflections of an Afrikaner African* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2000).

⁴³ D. & J. De Villiers, *PW* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1984); D. Prinsloo, *Stem uit die Wilderness: 'n Biografie oor oud-pres. PW Botha* (Voice from the Wilderness: A Biography of ex-president PW Botha (VAANDEL-Uitgewers, Mossel Bay, 1997).

⁴⁴ R. Kapuściński, *Another Day of Life* (Pan Books, London, 1987) is the English translation of the Polish account *Jeszcze dzień życia* originally published in 1976. Kapuściński, a Polish press agency correspondent, gives a vivid description of the mood in Luanda during the lead-up to independence.

⁴⁵ F. Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi: A Key to Africa* (Mainstream Publishing, Edinburgh, 1986); *The War for Africa: Twelve Months That Transformed a Continent* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1990). Bridgland was a British journalist who covered the Angolan war and became Savimbi's official biographer. *Jonas Savimbi* remains the key biography although it is noted for its unashamedly pro-UNITA slant.

⁴⁶ A. Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa: The Story of the Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Heinemann, London, 1990).

⁴⁷ B. Pogrund, *War of Words: Memoir of a South African Journalist* (Seven Stories Press, New York, 2000).

⁴⁸ D. Woods, *Asking for Trouble: The Education of a White African* (Beacon Press, Boston, 1980).

⁴⁹ A. Heard, *The Cape of Storms: A Personal History of the Crisis in South Africa* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1991).

⁵⁰ H. Tyson, *Editors Under Fire* (Random House, Sandton, 1993).

⁵¹ G. Shaw, *The Cape Times: An Informal History* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1999).

⁵² B. Fowler, *Pro Patria* (Sentinel Projects, Halifax, 1995).

⁵³ M. Paul, *Parabat: Personal Accounts of Paratroopers in Combat Situations in South Africa's History* (Covos Day, Johannesburg, 2001).

⁵⁴ *Sunday Times*, 31 October 1999.

book based on interviews with Defence Force generals of the apartheid era.⁵⁵ They were keen to correct what they felt was the Commission's one-sided portrayal of the Defence Force. Hamann had served in Operation Savannah as a 17-year-old conscript and devotes a chapter of his book to it. Unfortunately, he gives no references to the sources for some of his most interesting findings.⁵⁶

In 2002, as the research for this dissertation was nearing completion, Piero Gleijeses published *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976*, a study of Cuban activities in Africa.⁵⁷ Gleijeses, an American academic, was the first researcher to gain access to the Cuban archives on activities in Zaire (1964-65) and Angola (1975-76). He uses these archives together with recently declassified American documents, to establish an alternative chronology of American and Cuban escalation in Angola to that traditionally propounded at the time by American policy-makers, most notably then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. Gleijeses' work also sheds new light on Soviet-Cuban relations and, most importantly for this dissertation, on the nature of American-South African relations in 1975-76. A comprehensive chronology of the early stages of the Angolan civil war will only be written once the archives of Moscow, Lisbon, Pretoria, Paris, Luanda, Lusaka and Kinshasa receive the same attentions as Gleijeses has devoted to those in Havana.

⁵⁵ H. Hamann, *Days of the Generals: The Untold Story of South Africa's Apartheid-Era Military Generals* (Zebra, Struik Publishers, Cape Town, 2001), p. xi.

⁵⁶ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. xi.

⁵⁷ P. Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and Africa, 1959-1976* (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2002). Gleijeses is Professor of U.S. Foreign Policy at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies in Washington, D.C.

THE LISBON COUP AND THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR

On the morning of 25 April 1974, white South Africans listened to the results of their general election, which rewarded Vorster's National Party for its firm grip on internal black nationalism and continued economic growth. But other breaking headlines that day, of events five thousand miles away, were to set in train developments that would shatter their era of confidence. A military coup in Lisbon, the suddenness of which completely surprised Pretoria, set in motion developments that were to change the face of southern Africa.⁵⁸ The Portuguese colonies of Angola and Mozambique and Ian Smith's regime in Rhodesia formed a buffer of white-ruled territories shielding South Africa from 'black Africa' to the north. The dissolution of Lisbon's empire would break this *cordon sanitaire*, leaving Rhodesia indefensible and creating independent black states on South Africa's borders.

By 1974, Portugal had fought fourteen years' of simultaneous insurgencies in her far-flung African colonies of Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. Portugal spent half its national budget each year trying to cling to the world's last old-style, colonial empire and consequently, was on the brink of financial collapse.⁵⁹ Mounting military casualties meant draft-dodging and anti-war sabotage had become a way of life.⁶⁰ Increasing disillusionment and radicalisation within the army itself was spearheaded by the Armed Forces Movement (MFA), a clandestine group of young army officers inspired by a variety of social-democratic political convictions, which overthrew the regime of Prime Minister Marcello Caetano in their coup of 25 April 1974.⁶¹

The subsequent presidency of General Antonio de Spínola, head of a Junta of National Salvation, was dominated by the question of the future of the colonies. Spínola, a former governor of Guinea-Bissau, had laid out his plans for a 'Lusitanian federation' of Portugal and the colonies in his book *Portugal and the Future*.⁶² However, the MFA was pressing for full independence for all Portugal's overseas territories. The dispute led to the fall of the first provisional government in July 1974 and its replacement by a new MFA-dominated government.⁶³ On 27 July 1974, Spínola reluctantly announced that Portugal's colonies would

⁵⁸ J. Barber & J. Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy: The Search for Status and Security, 1945-88* (Cambridge University Press and the South African Institute of International Affairs, Cambridge, 1990), p. 175.

⁵⁹ Stiff, *The Silent War*, pp. 97-98.

⁶⁰ Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War*, p. 32.

⁶¹ A. Callinicos & J. Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto* (Pluto Press, London, 1978), p. 139.

⁶² A. de Spínola, *Portugal e o Futuro* (Arcadia, Lisbon, 1974). Under the provisions of the plan, each territory would vote whether or not to remain in a federation that would guarantee the rights of Portuguese settlers and give Portugal certain powers in the economic and military fields: D. Wheeler, 'Portuguese Withdrawal from Africa, 1974-1975: The Angolan Case', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1980), p. 5.

⁶³ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 145.

be granted independence.⁶⁴ Within a year, the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) and the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO) had been officially recognised by Portugal as rulers of fully independent states.⁶⁵

However, in Angola there was no heir apparent to political power but rather three rival liberation movements. The nature of the three movements, their social composition, base and leadership, has been the subject of extensive literature, of which John Marcum's two-volume history remains the authoritative account⁶⁶, and a brief summary will suffice here.

Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA)

The *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* was formed in 1956. It had some tribal foundations amongst the Mbundu of central Angola, but its support base lay primarily with Luanda's students and intellectuals, including mixed-race *mestizos* and *assimilados*, who had been granted the same rights as whites.⁶⁷ The MPLA began its armed struggle on 4 February 1961, when its supporters attacked the São Paulo prison in Luanda in an attempt to free its members held in custody. The insurrection was bloodily suppressed and most of the MPLA's leadership were killed or captured. Those that did escape fled into exile in the Congo and established training bases there.⁶⁸ The following year, Agostinho Neto, having escaped from house arrest in Portugal, became President of the movement.⁶⁹

The Soviet Union embraced Neto following his first visit to Moscow in 1964 and began providing the MPLA with limited aid.⁷⁰ Relations were coloured by Sino-Soviet rivalry, with the Soviets suspecting that the MPLA leadership was pro-Chinese, whilst the Chinese, who had given the MPLA some assistance in the early 1960s, feared the MPLA was pro-Soviet.⁷¹ The MPLA established contact with Cuba in 1965

⁶⁴ Stiff, *The Silent War*, p. 99.

⁶⁵ M. Wolfers & J. Bergerol, *Angola in the Front Line* (Zed Press, London, 1983), p. 1.

⁶⁶ J. Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. I: The Anatomy of an Explosion, 1950-1962* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1969); *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II: Exile Politics and Guerrilla Warfare, 1962-1976* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1978). In the early 1960s Marcum, an American scholar, walked 800 miles through Angola into the FNLA guerrilla camps.

⁶⁷ A. Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (I.B. Tauris, London & New York, 1996), p. 136; Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 141. *Assimilados* had formally renounced their 'Africanism' and become 'civilised' in the terminology of the Portuguese: W. Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up: The Revolutions in Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa* (Urizen Books, New York, 1978), p. 47.

⁶⁸ Stiff, *The Silent War*, p. 96; J. Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict: Internal and International Aspects* (South African Institute of International Affairs (Braamfontein, April 1976), p. 7.

⁶⁹ Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 6.

⁷⁰ *New York Times*, 17 December 1964; C. Stevens, 'The Soviet Role in Southern Africa', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, p. 47.

⁷¹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 242.

with Roberto as its President and Jonas Savimbi as its Foreign Minister.⁸² Between 1964 and 1971, the OAU (except Ghana, Guinea-Bissau and Congo) recognised the FNLA as the only legitimate nationalist movement in Angola.⁸³ Following the MPLA leadership struggle between Neto and Chipenda, in March 1975 Chipenda threw in his lot with Roberto.⁸⁴ The FNLA, of which he was appointed secretary-general, thereby gained a military presence in south-eastern Angola.⁸⁵

The FNLA's greatest asset was the support of Zaire.⁸⁶ The Bakongo tribe straddled the border areas of Angola and Zaire and the 1961 revolt in Angola had received support from across the border.⁸⁷ The link was further cemented when Roberto (who had spent most of his life in Zaire) married a sister of General Mobutu Sese Seko, later President of Zaire.⁸⁸ Through their attempts to court Mobutu, the Chinese came to favour the FNLA, which they also considered a counterbalance to the Soviet-supported MPLA.⁸⁹ In December 1973, Roberto visited Beijing⁹⁰ and in mid-1974 200 Chinese instructors arrived in Zaire to train FNLA troops.⁹¹ The Soviet Union had ended its limited assistance to the FNLA in 1964, claiming that Roberto had curtailed his own guerrilla operations in Angola under pressure from Washington.⁹² Mobutu was widely viewed as an American protégé⁹³ and there were accusations that Roberto had been on the CIA payroll from 1961 or 1962.⁹⁴ This token American support, begun during the Kennedy administration, appears to have dwindled as the Nixon administration reverted to wholesale support for the Portuguese in

⁸² Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 6.

⁸³ Stiff, *The Silent War*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Chipenda's 'Eastern Revolt' was a direct challenge to Neto and motivated by personal rather than political reasons: F. Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War: Foreign Intervention and Domestic Political Conflict* (Macmillan, London, 2001), p. 98.

⁸⁵ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 147; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 467 fn.30. As an Ovimbundu, Chipenda possessed the right ethnic affiliations to gain support in southern Angola: Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 360.

⁸⁶ One analyst went so far as to say that the FNLA was no more than an instrument of Zairean foreign policy: Ebinger, 'External Intervention in Internal War', p. 674.

⁸⁷ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 143.

⁸⁸ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977. Mobutu denied this relationship in an interview with *Jeune Afrique* (No. 790, 27 February 1976) and it may be that the two women only came from the same village: C. Young, 'The Portuguese Coup and Zaire's Southern Africa Policy', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, pp. 203, 211 fn.17.

⁸⁹ Young, 'The Portuguese Coup and Zaire's Southern Africa Policy', p. 199; James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola, 1974-1990* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, 1992), p. 59; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 238.

⁹⁰ James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola*, p. 59.

⁹¹ *Le Monde*, 5 June 1974. By August 1974, the FNLA had received 450 tons of weapons from China: Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 246; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 191.

⁹² *New York Times*, 17 December 1964.

⁹³ Young, 'The Portuguese Coup and Zaire's Southern Africa Policy', p. 197. The CIA first intervened in 1960 to topple Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba and connived in his assassination.

⁹⁴ *New York Times*, 25 September 1975, 19 December 1975. Gordon Winter, a defector from the South African Bureau of State Security, claimed that the FNLA was 'formed, funded and run by the CIA', which is undoubtedly an overstatement: G. Winter, *Inside BOSS: South Africa's Secret Police* (Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981), p. 538.

southern Africa.⁹⁵ In July 1974, the CIA reactivated its old relationship with Roberto and began sending small sums of money to the FNLA.⁹⁶

National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA)

The *União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola* began as a breakaway faction from the FNLA led by Jonas Savimbi.⁹⁷ In July 1964, Savimbi had resigned from the FNLA during a meeting of the OAU claiming that Holden Roberto was 'flagrantly tribalistic'.⁹⁸ He had first discussed joining the MPLA but was unable to reach an agreement on the position he would hold. UNITA's support came from the south and east of Angola, mainly from the Ovimbundu tribe. After attacking the Benguela railroad in 1967, UNITA lost the support of Zambia.⁹⁹ The following year Savimbi visited Beijing and secured token assistance.¹⁰⁰

Savimbi was accused of cooperating with the Portuguese. In July 1974, the Paris weekly *Afrique-Asie*, published four letters allegedly exchanged between Savimbi and Portuguese military officials prior to an attempted merger of the MPLA and FNLA in December 1972. The letters appeared to indicate substantial Portuguese-UNITA collaboration, including plans for joint attacks against the MPLA and FNLA and requests for ammunition by UNITA.¹⁰¹ They were dismissed as forgeries by UNITA, but many Portuguese officials attested to Savimbi's links with Lisbon.¹⁰² UNITA also faced unsubstantiated accusations of CIA-funding. According to one CIA source, UNITA consisted of 'twelve guys with knives' before American backing turned it into 'a well-financed, heavily armed guerrilla force'.¹⁰³ Discounting allegations against UNITA, the OAU gave the movement official recognition and an initial grant of \$32,000 in June 1974.¹⁰⁴

All three Angolan liberation movements had received assistance from communist benefactors at one time or another. Although the MPLA may have been somewhat more genuine in its leftist convictions, there was really very little to distinguish the three groups ideologically. The Director of the CIA, William Colby, later described the three Angolan movements: 'They are all independents. They are all for black Africa. They are all for some fuzzy kind of social system ... without really much articulation, but some sort of "let's not

⁹⁵ Legum, 'A Letter on Angola to American Liberals', p. 17; R. Morris, 'The Proxy War in Angola: Pathology of a Blunder', (*The New Republic*, Vol. 174, No. 5, 31 January 1976), p. 20.

⁹⁶ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 67.

⁹⁷ Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, pp. 63-65.

⁹⁸ Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 27.

⁹⁹ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 239.

¹⁰⁰ Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 7. According to Gordon Winter, Savimbi's 'friendship' with Beijing was merely a bluff to distance UNITA from the CIA: Winter, *Inside BOSS*, pp. 540-541.

¹⁰¹ 'Angola: La longue trahison de l'U.N.I.T.A.', (*Afrique-Asie*, Paris, Vol. 61, 8 July 1974). See also: W. Minter (ed.), *Operation Timber: Pages from the Savimbi Dossier* (Africa World Press, New Jersey, 1988).

¹⁰² Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 239.

¹⁰³ *The Guardian*, 22 December 1975.

¹⁰⁴ Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 107.

when Che Guevara took part in the struggle against Moïse Tshombe in Zaïre.⁷² Between 1966-1967, Cubans provided military training for MPLA troops in Congo, after which relations became distant with Cuban support limited to training a handful of MPLA fighters in Cuba.⁷³ Although recognised as a legitimate liberation movement by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1971⁷⁴, the MPLA was beset by leadership wrangles.⁷⁵ As a result, in 1972, the Soviets stopped all aid to Neto and only Yugoslavia continued its limited assistance.⁷⁶ Soviet interest in the MPLA resumed shortly after the Lisbon coup. Following a brief flirtation with Daniel Chipenda, one of Neto's challengers, Moscow recommenced support of Neto.⁷⁷ In August 1974, the Soviet Union announced that it considered Neto's MPLA to be the true voice of the Angolan people⁷⁸ and in late 1974 it decided to begin weapons shipments to the movement.⁷⁹ However, during early 1975 Yugoslavia remained the main supplier of weapons.⁸⁰

National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA)

The *Frente Nacional de Libertação de Angola* began as a Bakongo tribal separatist movement, the Union of the Peoples of North Angola, in 1954. Four years later it reinvented itself as the Union of Peoples of Angola (UPA), nominally committed to national independence. During March 1961 the UPA, under Holden Roberto, led a bloody revolt by Bakongo peasants and contract workers in northern Angola whose fellow tribesmen had recently won independence in the neighbouring French and Belgian Congos. The revolt was put down and the UPA leadership fled into exile in Zaïre (Belgian Congo). In 1962 the UPA changed its name to the FNLA and formed the Revolutionary Government of Angola in Exile (GRAE)⁸¹

⁷² Marquez, 'Operation Carlota', reproduced in English in D. Deutschmann, *Angola and Namibia: Changing the History of Africa* (Ocean Press, Melbourne, 1989), p. 41. See M. Halperin, 'The Cuban Role in Southern Africa', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, pp. 25-43.

⁷³ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, Vol. II, p. 225; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 244.

⁷⁴ D. Herbst, *White Man, We Want to Talk to You* (Andre Deutsch, London, 1979), p. 122.

⁷⁵ Three factions were contesting power: Neto's 'True MPLA', Daniel Chipenda's 'Eastern Revolt' and the 'Active Revolt' led by former MPLA president Mario de Andrade.

⁷⁶ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 243.

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 243; C. Legum, 'The Soviet Union, China and the West in Southern Africa', (*Foreign Affairs*, New York, Vol. 54, No. 4, October 1976), p. 749. Moscow managed to retrieve their shaken relationship with Neto by warning him that their intelligence had uncovered a plot by Chipenda to assassinate him: C. Legum, 'A Letter on Angola to American Liberals', (*The New Republic*, Vol. 174, No. 5, 31 January 1976), p. 17.

⁷⁸ F. Bridgland, 'Angola and the West', in A. Venter (ed.), *Challenge: Southern Africa Within the African Revolutionary Context, An Overview* (Ashanti Publishing, Gibraltar, 1989), p. 119.

⁷⁹ O. Westad, 'Moscow and the Angolan Crisis, 1974-1976: A New Pattern of Intervention', (*Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8-9, Winter 1996/7), pp. 23-24; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 347. According to one source, it was the leader of the Portuguese Communist Party who personally recommended that Moscow resume its arms deliveries to the MPLA: C. Ebinger, 'External Intervention in Internal War: The Politics and Diplomacy of the Angolan Civil War', (*Orbis*, Vol. 20, No. 3, Fall 1976), p. 688.

⁸⁰ The German Democratic Republic also sent weapons to the MPLA prior to independence: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 348-349.

⁸¹ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 142.

be exploited by the capitalist nations.”¹⁰⁵ Each of the movements spoke of socialism and employed Marxist rhetoric when the occasion called for it. Before April 1974, the foreign aid given to the three Angolan movements was sporadic and insignificant, essentially a matter of their various patrons keeping their hands in the game. The Lisbon coup, however, raised the stakes.

UNITA apparently signed a cease-fire with the Portuguese in June 1974¹⁰⁶ and the FNLA and MPLA followed suit in October 1974.¹⁰⁷ Despite skirmishes between the MPLA and FNLA forces in late 1974, all three movements were persuaded under pressure from the OAU to participate in negotiations with Portugal. Against a backdrop of bitter rivalry between the three parties, a transitional government was established by the Alvor agreement of January 1975. Three representatives from each of the movements, presided over by the Portuguese High Commissioner, would run Angola until elections to a constituent assembly were held, prior to independence on 11 November 1975. Each of the three Angolan movements was to contribute 8,000 troops to form a joint defence force together with 24,000 Portuguese troops. The phased withdrawal of these Portuguese troops would be completed by 29 February 1976.¹⁰⁸ The transitional government was inaugurated in Luanda on 31 January 1975. However, the power-sharing agreement collapsed under increasing animosity and mutual recriminations between the three movements.

In March FNLA troops, accompanied by detachments of the Zairean army, moved into Angola and occupied key towns in the northern areas.¹⁰⁹ Fighting soon erupted between the MPLA and FNLA in Luanda and on 15 May 1975 the Portuguese government declared virtual martial law in Angola.¹¹⁰ By June 1975 about 5,000 people had been killed in the fighting.¹¹¹ OAU-sponsored meetings in June and July between Roberto, Savimbi and Neto failed to stem the escalating conflict. In July, the MPLA drove the FNLA from Luanda¹¹² and Roberto entered Angola to take charge of his troops.¹¹³ On 21 August, Savimbi issued a formal declaration of war against the MPLA.¹¹⁴ As the fighting spread throughout Angola a massive airlift of Portuguese refugees was undertaken. On 29 August, Portugal formally annulled the Alvor agreement and dissolved the defunct transitional government.¹¹⁵ Each of the three movements scrambled

¹⁰⁵ Colby's testimony to the United States House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence: O. Pike, *CIA: The Pike Report* (Spokesman Books, Nottingham, 1977), p. 218.

¹⁰⁶ Stiff, *The Silent War*, p. 100. There is some controversy about the timing: Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 218; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, pp. 105-106.

¹⁰⁷ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 241. In order to sign the agreement on 21 October, Neto returned to Angola for the first time in nearly 30 years: Bridgland, 'Angola and the West', p. 119.

¹⁰⁸ For the full text of the Alvor Agreement see: Portuguese Ministry of Mass Communication, *Angola: The Independence Agreement* (Ministry of Mass Communication, Lisbon, 1975).

¹⁰⁹ Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, pp. 76-77.

¹¹⁰ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, pp. 207-208.

¹¹¹ *Financial Times*, 14 June 1975.

¹¹² Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 355.

¹¹³ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 257.

¹¹⁴ *The Times*, 22 August 1975.

¹¹⁵ G. Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation: United States' Policy Toward Angola since 1945* (Pluto Press, London, 1997), p. 64.

for financial and military support in order to bolster its own internal leverage before independence. This search led inevitably to the superpowers. Previously, the FNLA and UNITA had both asked for help to fight colonialism, now they wanted support to counter the 'communist threat' posed by the MPLA. The MPLA had called for assistance to fight colonialism, now it appealed for solidarity to defeat the 'neo-colonialist challenge' from its rivals.¹¹⁶ Although Lisbon lacked the political will and physical means to impose elections and an orderly transfer of power, Angolan independence remained fixed for 11 November 1975.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁶ Guimarães, *The Origins of the Angolan Civil War*, p. 97.

¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Lisbon announced that its troops would leave Angola by 11 November, not February as stated in the Alvor agreement. Given the situation in Portugal itself, the Portuguese had been unable to keep their forces at full strength and only 2,000 remained to embark from Luanda on 11 November: Wheeler, 'Portuguese Withdrawal from Africa', pp. 11-12.

WHY DID SOUTH AFRICA INTERVENE IN THE ANGOLAN CIVIL WAR?

As the Portuguese scrambled out of Africa, Pretoria resigned itself to accommodation with a FRELIMO administration in Mozambique. Vorster resisted appeals to support an attempted putsch by white Portuguese settlers in Lourenço Marques (Maputo) in September 1974, and rejected out of hand the right-wing Herstigte Nasionale Party's calls for a South African invasion of Mozambique.¹ The Defence Minister, P.W. Botha stated: 'We do not believe it is in the interests of the Republic to interfere in the affairs of the other countries, because we do not want other countries to poke their noses into our affairs.'² The Foreign Minister, Hilgard Muller, saw FRELIMO's rise to power, 'as a challenge and not as a disaster or a threat. It should rather be seen as an opportunity for us to prove further that we, as is the position in the case of our other neighbouring states, are prepared to and can live and work together with these neighbours in peace and friendship, irrespective of who is in power.'³ In response to Mozambique's formal independence on 25 June 1975, Vorster promptly declared that he had no objection to the government of Samora Machel. He claimed to have received assurances that Mozambique would not be used as a launch pad for guerrilla activity against South Africa.⁴ If Vorster could accept developments in Mozambique and indeed nudge Ian Smith towards a 'moderate' compromise in Rhodesia⁵, why then did he decide on armed intervention in Angola?

Writing in late 1976, a South African political commentator noted, 'It is perhaps still too early to know exactly why Vorster temporarily abandoned his role as the de Gaulle of Southern Africa, when the consequences of South Africa's involvement could be anticipated by any rational, pragmatically calculating analyst'.⁶ At that stage the South African public had still been told very little about recent events in Angola. South Africa's opponents were levelling charges of neo-colonialist expansion at Pretoria. Cuba's representative to the United Nations claimed in a speech to the General Assembly that South Africa had

¹ T. Hanf, H. Weiland, G. Vierdag, L. Sclemmer, R. Hampel & B. Krupp, *South Africa: The Prospects of Peaceful Change: An Empirical Enquiry into the Possibility of Democratic Conflict Regulation* (Rex Collings, David Philip, London, Cape Town, 1981), p. 72.

² Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 9 September 1974, col. 2537.

³ Ibid, 10 September 1974, col. 2590. Mozambique's heavy economic dependence on South Africa was seen as an important factor in securing the 'friendly cooperation' of her new leaders: R. Jaster, *South Africa's Narrowing Security Options* (International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper 159, London 1980), p. 21.

⁴ J. De St. Jorre, *A House Divided: South Africa's Uncertain Future* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, New York, 1977), p. 68. However, Pretoria's continued ill-disguised hostility toward the FRELIMO government betrayed a certain lack of confidence in any such assurances: E. Harsch, *South Africa: White Rule, Black Revolt* (Monad Press, New York, 1980), p. 156.

⁵ Vorster recognised the inevitability of African independence in Rhodesia and wanted to avoid further involvement in the country's drawn-out guerrilla war. He realised that South Africa's best interests would not be served by continuing to back the Smith regime but by ensuring that a conservative black government would succeed: P. O'Meara, 'South Africa's Contradictory Regional Goals', in R. Davis (ed.), *Apartheid Unravels* (University of Florida Press, Gainesville, Florida, 1991), p. 218.

entered Angola 'with the clear intention of preventing the independence of that country and of occupying the entire territory.'⁷ South Africa stressed that the occupation of Angola had never been their aim. So why did South Africa send troops into Angola?

The Defence Force's official statement released in February 1977 gave four reasons for South African involvement in southern Angola. 1) The failure of the Portuguese government to ensure the safety of workers on the Cunene hydroelectric scheme had led the SADF to move in. 2) The chaotic situation in Angola had allowed SWAPO terrorists easy access into South West Africa and necessitated 'hot pursuits' across the border by the SADF. 3) UNITA and the FNLA had appealed to South Africa for support against communist infiltration in Angola, and it was decided to help Savimbi re-conquer and hold his traditional sphere of influence in southern Angola, thus forcing the MPLA to accept a government in which all three Angolan movements would be represented. 4) Angolan refugees fleeing into South West Africa had alerted the Defence Force to Cuban support for the MPLA, a suspicion that was confirmed when Cuban ammunition and weapon dumps were found on a hot pursuit operation.⁸ These four factors deserve close consideration.

THE CUNENE RIVER HYDROELECTRIC SCHEME

'In the first place it was necessary for the RSA to intervene on a limited scale in Angola to safeguard her security interests. South Africa responded to a call from the workers on the Calueque-Ruacana scheme to protect them in the situation which had resulted from the Portuguese withdrawal and the absence of any form of governmental authority in that area'.
(Republic of South Africa, *White Paper on Defence*, 1977)⁹

In 1969, South Africa and Portugal had agreed to a joint hydro-electricity and irrigation scheme on the Cunene (Kunene) River, which would help foster white settlement in southern Angola and provide water and power for northern Namibia. The scheme, still under construction in 1975, straddled the border between Angola and Namibia. The turbines, which harnessed the Cunene, were south of the border at Ruacana but the scheme also involved building dams further up the river including one at Calueque, about 20 kilometres inside Angola.¹⁰

⁶ H. Adam, 'Ideologies of Dedication vs Blueprints of Expedience', (*Social Dynamics*, Vol. 2, No. 2, December 1976), pp. 89-90.

⁷ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 14.

⁸ South African Defence Force, *Nature and Extent of the SADF's Involvement in the Angolan Conflict* (Defence Headquarters, Pretoria, 3 February 1977), referred to hereafter as *SADF Statement*, 1977.

⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production*, 1977 (Department of Defence, Pretoria, 1977), p. 6.

In June 1975, it was reported that South African troops had taken up positions at the Ruacana Falls on the Namibian side of the border.¹¹ On 8 August 1975, the *Windhoek Advertiser* reported clashes between the MPLA and UNITA at Ruacana and the intimidation of workers on the scheme.¹² The following day a South African infantry platoon, supported by two armoured cars, crossed the border and headed for Calueque. They intended 'to hold talks to ensure that order was restored', but instead they were fired upon, 'The result was that they fired back, and in the process occupied Calueque.'¹³ The presence of South African troops in occupation of the Calueque dam was first reported in the Lisbon left-wing daily *Diário de Notícias* on 11 August 1975.¹⁴ *The Economist's* response was to suggest that South Africa might intend to annexe the Ruacana dam.¹⁵ The *Financial Times* reported fears in Angola that South Africa might use the civil war to encourage a 'balkanisation' of the country: a "'Katanga-type" solution' in which Angola would be dismembered between the three rival liberation movements.¹⁶ The news was not reported in South Africa. On 11 August Defence Minister Botha banned 'reports or speculation concerning South African military movements and activities on the South West Africa/Angola border or at any border posts, in particular at Ruacana'.¹⁷

Botha later claimed that South African troops had been sent to the area with the prior knowledge and approval of the Portuguese government.¹⁸ However, it was nearly a month before the Portuguese Ministry of Foreign Affairs commented on the South African action, in a communiqué which appeared in the Lisbon press on 5 September 1975: 'A squadron of some 30 soldiers removed to the dam site as necessary protection of South African workers. This was necessary to guarantee – in conformity with the agreements in force between Portugal and South Africa – the maintenance of water supplies vital to the subsistence of the Ovambo population in the area'.¹⁹ This coincided with a public statement the same day by the South

¹⁰ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1976* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, January 1977), p. 411.

¹¹ François Campredon, *Agence France Presse*, 10 June 1975 quoted in Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, Vol. II, p. 268.

¹² Quoted in Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 357.

¹³ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 47. See also: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 44-48.

¹⁴ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 140.

¹⁵ 'Flight from Angola', *The Economist*, 16 August 1975, p. 36.

¹⁶ 'South African Sends Troops into Angola to Protect River Project', *Financial Times*, 23 August 1975.

¹⁷ He repeated this ban on 16 August: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 209. On 13 August Harvey Tyson, the editor of *The Star* wrote that there was news of national and international importance which could not be published and suggested that his readers listen to the BBC: Tyson, *Editors Under Fire*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁸ *The Star*, 22 November 1975; Botha's Press Statement, 17 December 1975 quoted in D. Van Vuuren, 'South Africa's Foreign Policy and International Practice, 1975', (*South African Yearbook of International Law*, Vol. 1, 1975), p. 206.

¹⁹ Quoted in Wolfers & Bergerol, *Angola in the Front Line*, p. 13. The numbers of troops involved in this initial action have been disputed. In the same account Wolfers and Bergerol, writing from the MPLA perspective, claimed a thousand troops entered Angola, whilst Christopher Coker put the number at 500: C. Coker, 'South Africa: A New Military Role in Southern Africa', in R. Jaster (ed.), *Southern Africa:*

Africa Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Brand Fourie, that South Africa had sent a 30-man patrol some 36 kilometres into Angola to protect the Ruacana project.²⁰ A brief flurry of attention in the overseas press accompanied the South African admission, which Botha allowed the South African press to carry.²¹

During the following months and the escalating conflict Vorster's government used the acknowledged presence of troops at Calueque and Ruacana to dismiss overseas reports of SADF troops deep inside Angola.²² As late as 17 December 1975, when four South African prisoners of war captured deep within Angola were being held by the MPLA, Botha reiterated the claim that South African intervention only involved securing the border and the Cunene scheme and stressed: 'We endorse the view that no foreign troops should be in Angola and that the Angolan people alone, must decide their future in an orderly manner.'²³ This was a clever manipulation of the facts by Vorster and Botha. Even the most critical opponent of the government would not suggest that it was unreasonable for South Africa to protect its economic interests just across the border. In the subsequent parliamentary debate on the Angolan intervention, the defence spokesman of the official Opposition referred to Calueque and Ruacana: 'Obviously we must take action to protect our interests...I am convinced that throughout the country nobody but a fool or a traitor would oppose the action that was taken there.'²⁴ The *Cape Times*, which was the most vocal critic of intervention in the Angolan war, admitted that protection of the Cunene scheme was justifiable on a temporary basis.²⁵

However, defence of the scheme was clearly not sufficient to explain the subsequent deeper South African penetration of Angola. After the war Colin Eglin of the Progressive Reform Party told Parliament: 'I believe that this Government has made a serious error in using its protection of these schemes [Ruacana and Calueque] as the cover-up for its major involvement in the civil war.'²⁶ General Constand Viljoen, SADF Director General of Operations at the time, has since stated:

Regional Security Problems and Prospects (International Institute for Strategic Studies, London, 1985), p. 143.

²⁰ Quoted in *The Star*, 6 September 1975.

²¹ On 9 September Botha sent a message to South African newspaper editors explaining that he had not permitted news of South Africa's incursion into Angola to be publicised until 6 September as negotiations had been underway with the Portuguese since 12 August: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 210.

²² For example: 'Watch on the Cunene', *South African Digest*, 16 January 1976, pp. 8-11; 'Ruacana en Calueque: so beskerm die SA Weermag ons belange' (The SA Army protects our interests), *Paratus*, 27 January 1976, pp. 10-14. *Paratus* was the official publication of the SADF. The article stressed the importance of the scheme and claimed: 'There are just enough soldiers to ensure peace and quiet'.

²³ *Die Volksblad*, 17 December 1975 translated in Van Vuuren, 'South Africa's Foreign Policy and International Practice, 1975', p. 191.

²⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 61.

²⁵ *Cape Times*, 5 December 1975.

²⁶ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 16 February 1976, col. 1271.

'Let me put that straight. That [the Cunene scheme] was used in order to explain the presence of South Africans in Angola. It is true South African involvement in the scheme was big and it's true Ovamboland was very dependent on the water, and South West Africa on the electricity, but I must be honest, I always got the impression it was a handy way of explaining an operation that didn't have the intention of protecting Calueque and Ruacana. It was a handy explanation to use to the rest of the world.'²⁷

After its reference to the Calueque-Ruacana scheme, the 1977 *White Paper on Defence* continued: 'This military intervention was then extended in order to deflect the effects of the Angolan civil war from the northern border of South-West Africa and to inhibit SWAPO efforts to capitalise on the unstable situation in the southern region of Angola'.²⁸

THE BORDER WAR AND SWAPO

Q: 'Why did South Africa intervene in Angola?'

A: 'Originally I thought it was to get rid of SWAPO. After Portugal withdrew southern Angola was clear for SWAPO to operate...[T]he guys on the ground thought the goal was the end of SWAPO.'

(Interview with Colonel Jan Breytenbach)

Having been seized from Germany by South Africa at the request of the Western Allies during the First World War, South West Africa became a South African mandate under the League of Nations. In 1946, the United Nations assumed trusteeship but South Africa did not accept that the United Nations was the automatic heir to the League mandate and refused to hand over the territory. In 1969, the United Nations Security Council endorsed the termination of the mandate by the General Assembly and called on South Africa to withdraw from 'Namibia'. Two years later the International Court of Justice ruled that South Africa's continued presence was indeed illegal, and ordered it to withdraw immediately.²⁹ In December 1974, the United Nations Security Council again condemned South Africa's 'continued illegal occupation' of Namibia.³⁰ Confronted with the threat of sanctions if the Namibia issue remained unresolved, Vorster convened a constitutional conference in Windhoek in September 1975. The Turnhalle Conference's mandate was to draft a constitution, after which an interim administration would be established to lead

²⁷ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 22-23.

²⁸ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence 1977*, p. 6.

²⁹ D. Warren, *United States - South African Foreign Relations: South Africa's Response to the Kissinger Initiative in Southern Africa, 1976* (BA Thesis in History, University of Cape Town, 1983), p. 6.

³⁰ V. Brittain, *Hidden Lives, Hidden Deaths: South Africa's Crippling of a Continent* (Faber & Faber, London, 1988), p. 77; Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War*, p. 22; Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 120.

Namibia to independence. However, the main Namibian liberation movement, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) was not invited to participate and the talks were doomed to failure.³¹

The United Nations General Assembly recognised SWAPO led by Sam Nujoma as the 'sole and authentic' representative of the Namibian people. SWAPO's Dar es Salaam Declaration in 1966 had launched their armed struggle against South African occupation. Vorster branded SWAPO as having been 'conceived and born in communist sin'.³² SWAPO's military offensive was seen in Pretoria as a manifestation of the communist threat directed at South Africa. Vorster warned that 'the ultimate aim of the communist and leftist powers is not Rhodesia, Mozambique or Angola – their ultimate aim is South Africa. The ultimate aim is what can be taken from South African soil. But what perhaps is even more important to them is the control over the Cape sea route in the event of another conventional war.'³³ That SWAPO enjoyed United Nations' support only rendered it more suspect in Pretoria's eyes.

The first clash between SWAPO's armed wing, the People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), and the SADF took place on 26 August 1966 when South African helicopter-borne troops attacked a PLAN training camp in northern Namibia.³⁴ It heralded the beginning of a protracted low-intensity war on the border between northern Namibia and southern Angola. SWAPO guerrillas infiltrated into Namibia from their bases in Zambia by two routes: either through the Caprivi Strip or through south-eastern Angola. From its bases in Namibia the SADF began helicopter reconnaissance patrols of the southern border regions of Angola. South African forces operated against PLAN guerrillas with Portuguese knowledge and acquiescence and there was limited covert military cooperation with the Portuguese army in counter-insurgency operations.³⁵ In 1968, a secret agreement with Portugal established a joint South African-Portuguese air base and command centre at Cuito Cuanavale, in south-east Angola, from where the SADF carried out reconnaissance and operations against both PLAN and the Angolan liberation movements.³⁶

As Lisbon fought its nationalist opponents in Africa, it was natural that there should be frequent consultation between the Portuguese and South African governments. South Africa assigned intelligence officers to its consulates-general in Luanda and Lourenço Marques with instructions to work with the

³¹ R. Jaster, *The Defense of White Power: South African Foreign Policy Under Pressure* (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1989), pp. 60-61. South Africa preferred and sought to impose a multiple-tier ethnically-grouped electoral system in Namibia. The Conference was designed to create an ethnic alternative to the United Nations' demands for unitary independence. Having been rejected by SWAPO, it failed to gain international recognition as a genuine constitutional conference.

³² Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 361.

³³ Ibid, 4 February 1974 quoted in O. Geyser (ed.), *B.J. Vorster: Selected Speeches* (Institute for Contemporary History, University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, 1977), p. 214.

³⁴ T. Weaver, 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', in J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds), *War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1989), p. 91.

³⁵ H.-R. Heitman, *War in Angola: The Final South African Phase* (Ashanti, Gibraltar, 1990), p. 10.

³⁶ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 266.

Portuguese military.³⁷ Although there were no formal defence agreements, representatives of the Portuguese, South African and Rhodesian security services met at regular intervals to discuss military and security affairs of common interest.³⁸ Since at least the early 1970s, South Africa had been covertly supplying arms and manned helicopters to the Portuguese.³⁹ Border security remained largely the preserve of the South African Police until 1973 when the SADF assumed responsibility for counter-insurgency operations against SWAPO. By July 1973, the SADF was in command of the 'operational area'⁴⁰ and in June of the following year South Africa suffered its first casualty of the border war.⁴¹

By mid-1975 a state of extreme tension existed along Namibia's northern border with Angola.⁴² In a speech in London on June 1975, Nujoma announced that the armed struggle was to be stepped up.⁴³ The following month the commander of the South African forces in Namibia warned that SWAPO was taking advantage of the collapse of Portuguese authority to consolidate its position in southern Angola.⁴⁴ It was reported that only a few months after the Lisbon coup more than 2,000 Namibians had fled through Angola for guerrilla training in exile.⁴⁵ The SADF feared that after the withdrawal of the Portuguese, SWAPO would be able to use southern Angola as a sanctuary from which to launch infiltrations into northern Namibia.⁴⁶ As fighting among the rival Angolan movements spread southwards, thousands of refugees fled into Namibia.⁴⁷ The SADF's 1977 account claimed the stream of Angolan refugees into Namibia provided an open avenue for 'SWAPO terrorists to freely cross the border to commit murder and robbery in Ovambo and to disappear again into the chaos of southern Angola'.⁴⁸ The murder on 17 August 1975 of Philemon Elifas, the Chief Minister of Ovambo was interpreted as evidence of heightened SWAPO activity.⁴⁹ Elifas was an important

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ C. Dalcanton, 'Vorster and the Politics of Confidence, 1966-1974', (*African Affairs*, London, Vol. 75, No. 299, April 1976), p. 171; Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 52.

³⁹ D. Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making* (Macmillan for the South African Institute of International Affairs, Braamfontein, 1984), p. 75.

⁴⁰ Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 210.

⁴¹ A.J. Venter, *The Chopper Boys: Helicopter Warfare in Africa* (Southern Book Publishers, Johannesburg, 1994), p. 134.

⁴² Botha later claimed that on 9 April 1975, the Owamboland Cabinet had asked the South African government 'to safeguard the Angolan border and to take action against terrorists threatening that country': Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 45.

⁴³ *Morning Star*, 14 June 1975.

⁴⁴ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 69.

⁴⁵ Benjamin Pogrund, 'Pastor Tells Why Blacks Are Fleeing', *Daily Telegraph*, 3 November 1974 quoted in C. Chimutengwende, *South Africa: The Press and the Politics of Liberation* (Barbican Books, London, 1978), p. 97. Nujoma had issued a call from Botswana for Namibians to leave the country and join the struggle: J. Putz, H. Von Egidy & P. Caplan, *Namibia Handbook and Political Who's Who* (The Magus Company, Windhoek, 1989), p. 256.

⁴⁶ Steenkamp, *South Africa's Border War*, p. 60.

⁴⁷ Jaster, *South Africa's Narrowing Security Options*, p. 23.

⁴⁸ *SADF Statement*, 1977.

⁴⁹ Barber & Barratt, *South Africa's Foreign Policy*, p. 190. Elifas' traditionalist Ovamboland Independence Party had opted for separate independence along the lines of South Africa's Bantustan policy, and so he was considered a collaborator by SWAPO: J. Marcum, 'Southern Africa after the Collapse of Portuguese

mover in the Turnhalle Constitutional Conference, which was scheduled to begin in Windhoek on 2 September, and his death was a severe propaganda loss to the South Africans.⁵⁰

The SADF continued with its low-level anti-insurgency campaign of hot-pursuits and raids against SWAPO.⁵¹ These activities have led some accounts to date the SADF's entrance into the Angolan war as early as June 1975.⁵² Indeed, when Botha later listed South African casualties in Angola in Parliament he spoke of them as being 'from 14 July 1975 to 23 January 1976'.⁵³ There appears to have been more than a small degree of confusion during these cross-border pursuits with the SADF attacking SWAPO, MPLA and UNITA forces before withdrawing to Namibia.⁵⁴ Both the MPLA and UNITA were regarded as sympathetic to SWAPO. At times it was difficult for the South African forces operating in the bush of southern Angola to distinguish one group of guerrillas from another. Colonel Jan Breytenbach explained: 'The situation in southern Angola became quite chaotic with towns changing hands frequently between any of the three movements. It became difficult for the South Africans, on the southern banks of the Okavango and Cunene rivers to determine which troops from which movement they were facing across the border, whether they were actively hostile or not or whether they were perhaps SWAPO supporters, passively or otherwise'.⁵⁵

Towards the end of August the South Africans' permanent presence in Angola moved beyond the defence of the Cunene scheme as the SADF staged their first offensive thrust.⁵⁶ On 22 August, according to MPLA sources, a force of between 800 and 1,000 SADF troops 'accompanied by a dozen armed helicopters and several armoured cars', advanced along the main road leading from Namibia towards the district capital of Pereira d'Eça (Ngiva). The force then withdrew to a position between the town and the border.⁵⁷ Portuguese reconnaissance planes confirmed damage to the town but their spokesmen stated that the invading force was 'certainly smaller' than the figure of 800 given by the MPLA.⁵⁸ This action was justified as retaliation for an earlier SWAPO attack on an SADF camp on the Namibian side of the border.⁵⁹ Du Preez described the operation on 22 August as 'a major raid on SWAPO camps in southern

Rule', in H. Kitchen (ed.), *Africa: From Mystery to Maze* (Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass., 1976), p. 89.

⁵⁰ S. Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means - SWAPO's Liberation War', in C. Leys & J. Saul (eds), *Namibia's Liberation Struggle: The Two-Edged Sword* (James Currey, London, 1995), p. 25.

⁵¹ Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 353.

⁵² Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975', p. 121.

⁵³ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 50.

⁵⁴ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 153 fn.4.

⁵⁵ Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 43-44.

⁵⁷ *The Guardian*, 4 September 1975.

⁵⁸ *Financial Times*, 5 September 1975.

⁵⁹ *Daily Mail*, 5 September 1975.

Angola'.⁶⁰ The SADF statement makes no mention of this episode but it does refer, without specifying date or place to a 'hot pursuit operation' in which the 'Defence Force came across Cuban ammunition dumps'.

Pereira d'Eça was 100 miles east of the Ruacana dam and this move by the SADF was clearly motivated by something other than the need to defend the Cunene scheme. The MPLA had established an office in Pereira d'Eça, which was only 30 miles north of the Namibian border, and the SADF feared this would lead to the spread of radical political ideas among the Ovambo people, and to growing support for SWAPO.⁶¹ Although news of the incursion was reported in the overseas press⁶² and carried on the BBC World Service, publication of any news of the troop movement was prohibited in South Africa. Botha declined to comment at all on these reports, which some South Africans had in any case heard on their radios.⁶³ South African newspapers were only allowed to carry speculative reports suggesting that South African troops 'may' have been using hot pursuit tactics across an unspecified border.⁶⁴

So by the end of August, the SADF was firmly in control of the Cunene scheme and had established a presence in or near Pereira d'Eça. Throughout September, the SADF continued with raids against SWAPO across the border. UNITA and the FNLA, 'both now allies of the Republic of South Africa', helped locate the SWAPO camps.⁶⁵

UNITA AND FNLA APPEALS FOR ASSISTANCE

According to the Defence Force's official 1977 statement, UNITA and the FNLA appealed to South Africa for support against communist infiltration in Angola. As a consequence it was decided to help Savimbi reconquer and hold his traditional sphere of influence in southern Angola, thus forcing the MPLA to accept a government in which all three Angolan movements would be represented. Presumably the statement intended the same reasoning be applied to the extension of assistance to Roberto's FNLA, although this was not explicitly stated.⁶⁶ The official press release gave no further details as to the nature of the contacts South Africa had established with Savimbi of UNITA, or Roberto and Chipenda of the FNLA.

⁶⁰ Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 28-29.

⁶¹ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 69.

⁶² The first report was 'S. African Troops in Angola,' *Standard* (Nairobi), 1 September 1975.

⁶³ Shaw, *The Cape Times*, p. 263.

⁶⁴ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 209. The *Cape Times* condemned what was happening as 'news management' rather than protection of national security. It told its readers that defence legislation had been invoked to prohibit publication of news that had already been broadcast to the four corners of the earth: *Cape Times*, 5 September 1975.

⁶⁵ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 43.

⁶⁶ *SADF Statement, 1977*.

During the war it was not in the interests of any of the parties involved to disclose details of their secret diplomacy. On 9 December 1975, Savimbi emphatically told a Lusaka press conference that South Africa was not assisting UNITA.⁶⁷ However, on 29 January 1976, Henry Kissinger claimed that South Africa had entered the civil war in early September 1975 after 'the poorly equipped UNITA forces turned in desperation to South Africa for assistance against the MPLA, which was overrunning UNITA's ethnic areas in the south.'⁶⁸ In 1977, R.W. Johnson revealed some details of the covert diplomacy between South Africa and the Angolan nationalist leaders, in his book *How Long Will South Africa Survive?* Spies' and Du Preez's subsequent accounts, whilst both discreet about Pretoria's dealings with the United States and other friendly governments, were more candid about UNITA and the FNLA's relations with Pretoria.⁶⁹ Consequently, a general, albeit tentative, chronology can be constructed.

According to Spies' account the first contact between South Africa and UNITA personnel took place in July 1974. UNITA requested weapons from the South Africans and a small amount of weaponry and 6,000 rounds of ammunition were delivered on 9 October 1974.⁷⁰ Savimbi himself met with 'a senior South African intelligence officer' in Europe in March 1975.⁷¹ At a second meeting in Lusaka on 14 April, Savimbi requested cash and small arms. In return, '[h]e promised to do everything in his power to prevent armed units of SWAPO from entering South West Africa'.⁷² However, when Savimbi refused to establish a formal alliance with Roberto as the South Africans were urging, his request was rejected.⁷³ Savimbi was careful to retain South Africa's attention and made ingratiating declarations to the press that he considered Vorster 'a responsible leader' and man of 'realism', and that UNITA 'favoured dialogue and a policy of détente'.⁷⁴ A few weeks later Savimbi was quoted as saying that Angola's own problems would prevent UNITA from extending further assistance to SWAPO, a long-time ally.⁷⁵

The first contact with the FNLA was made, according to Spies' account, on 28 February 1975 when a FNLA representative arrived at the South African embassy in London with a request for weapons from Roberto. Although the Department of Foreign Affairs investigated the appeal no action was taken.⁷⁶ Then

⁶⁷ *The Times*, 10 December 1975.

⁶⁸ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings Before the Subcommittee on African Affairs of the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, on U.S. Involvement in Civil War in Angola, January 29, February 3, 4, and 6, 1976* (US Government Printing Office, Washington, 1976), p. 10.

⁶⁹ See: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 60-65; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 13-23.

⁷⁰ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 60-62.

⁷¹ This meeting was possibly held in Paris, as Savimbi was known to be developing contacts with the French at the same time: Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 358.

⁷² Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 62.

⁷³ Moss, 'How South Africa Took on Castro's Invaders', *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

⁷⁴ *The Star* (weekly edition), 3 May 1975; *Afrique-Asie*, 19 May 1975.

⁷⁵ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 12 June 1975. UNITA and SWAPO had been closely linked by tribal affiliations and often dual membership: W. Steenkamp, 'Politics of Power: The Border War', in A.J. Venter (ed.), *Challenge*, p. 193.

⁷⁶ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 62.

at the end of May, the *Windhoek Advertiser* reported 'Black Guerrilla Leader in Windhoek'.⁷⁷ Daniel Chipenda had flown in with an FNLA 'political commissar', ostensibly for 'medical treatment'.⁷⁸ However, the precise nature of his visit remains unclear. Around the same time a delegation of Portuguese businessmen, purporting to be FNLA supporters, sought an interview with Vorster in Cape Town and begged him to send troops to Luanda to restore order.⁷⁹ In July Chipenda was back in Namibia and this time had three days of talks with General van den Bergh of the South African Bureau for State Security (BOSS).⁸⁰ The first meeting between South African representatives and Roberto himself was organised by Portuguese intermediaries and took place in Kinshasa in July. According to Robert Moss, on the strength of Roberto's undertaking to join forces with Savimbi, the South Africans agreed to give the FNLA a shipment of mostly second-hand light machine guns, rifles and mortars. These arrived in August.⁸¹ On 6 August, Neto in Luanda claimed that the FNLA had South African backing and that Chipenda, as the FNLA's military commander, had held talks with 'highly placed South Africans' who had promised military and economic aid. This was widely reported in the international press.⁸²

In late May 1975 Vorster asked for a full report outlining the alternative courses of action available to South Africa in relation to Angola and the implications of each. The Defence Department presented him with an options paper in June 1975.⁸³ Soon after the Lisbon coup, Military Intelligence had put out feelers to the three Angolan movements and concluded that, whilst UNITA and the FNLA were quite well-disposed towards South Africa, should the MPLA come to power South Africa's interests in Namibia might be seriously jeopardised.⁸⁴ At Vorster's request General Viljoen, SADF Director General of Operations, and General van den Bergh prepared a list of weapons for Savimbi and Roberto, with a total price tag of R20million. On 14 July Vorster approved the list when Van den Bergh visited him on his game ranch.⁸⁵ Van den Bergh personally travelled abroad to purchase weapons, upsetting ARMSCOR in the process.⁸⁶ On 17 July he sent a telegram from Paris that he had managed to purchase all the weapons needed.⁸⁷

According to Spies, it was decided in August 1975 to assist the FNLA and UNITA until independence on 11 November in order to prevent the MPLA from gaining control of Angola. Consequently on 28 August Army Headquarters issued Operations Order 8/75, which authorised the supply of arms and training to

⁷⁷ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 30 May 1975.

⁷⁸ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, Vol. II, p. 268.

⁷⁹ Stiff, *The Silent War*, p. 104.

⁸⁰ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 150; Winter, *Inside BOSS*, p. 537. *The Times*, 8 December 1975 had reported Chipenda's visit but gave no details of negotiations.

⁸¹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

⁸² Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 208.

⁸³ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp. 78-80; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 63-64.

⁸⁴ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 78.

⁸⁵ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 23-24.

⁸⁶ De Villiers, PW, p. 247. According to Botha's official biography, Botha, who was visiting the border with Admiral Hugo Biermann, Chief of the SADF, was only informed of the decision three days later.

⁸⁷ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 23-24.

UNITA and the FNLA.⁸⁸ At the end of August, Savimbi and FNLA representatives were informed at a meeting in UNITA-held territory, that the SADF would provide instructors for the two movements. Two training camps were established: one for UNITA at Calombo, south of Silva Porto (Bie), and another for FNLA/Chipenda forces at Mapupa, 75 kilometres north-east of Rundu in southern Angola.⁸⁹ Commandant Jan Breytenbach was tasked with training the FNLA troops and flew to Mapupa in late August.⁹⁰ In late September 1975, Commandant 'Kaas' van der Waals of the SADF arrived in Silva Porto as a liaison officer to Savimbi and was followed by a team of 19 instructors. Their orders were to provide training in conventional warfare for UNITA troops, and to help UNITA establish its position militarily in central Angola.⁹¹

By mid-September the MPLA had gained control of twelve out of Angola's sixteen districts. The only areas out of its control were Roberto's stronghold in the two northern districts bordering Zaire, the two central districts around Silva Porto (Bié) and Nova Lisboa (Huambo); and a few scattered points in the far south.⁹² However, at that time Savimbi was promising: 'within thirty days very great changes will take place in Angola as far as the military situation is concerned'.⁹³ South Africa's provision of instructors and arms to the FNLA and UNITA was a significant escalation in its intervention in the Angolan war. However, SADF troops were not yet involved in active combat.

CUBAN INTERVENTION IN ANGOLA

'[O]ur involvement in Angola was not the cause of Russian and Cuban intervention. Our involvement was the effect of Russian and Cuban intervention. If they did not enter Angola, if they did not take part in this affair, if they did not try to subvert the whole of Angola and to suppress its people, South Africa would never have entered Angola at all... We went in to chase Cuba and the MPLA away from the dam.'

(Speech by Vorster, 30 January 1976)⁹⁴

'[T]he fascist and racist troops of South Africa criminally invaded Angolan territory long before Cuba sent any regular units of soldiers there.'

(Speech by Fidel Castro, 19 April 1976)⁹⁵

⁸⁸ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 144.

⁸⁹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

⁹⁰ When he commenced training in mid-September, Breytenbach thought his task was to take on UNITA who were on friendly terms with SWAPO: Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, pp. 12-16; *Forged in Battle*, pp. 4-12.

⁹¹ *SADF Statement, 1977*; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977; I. Uys, *Cross of Honour* (Uys Publishers, Germiston, 1992), p. 18.

⁹² *West Africa*, 19 September 1975.

⁹³ Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 361.

⁹⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 368.

The question of 'who did what first' in the internationalisation and escalation of the Angolan civil war is one which a quarter-century of scholarship has failed to answer definitively. Did the presence of Soviet-supported Cubans in Angola propel Pretoria to invade, as Vorster claimed, or was it South Africa's intervention that brought the Cubans to Angola? During the conflict both the MPLA and FNLA-UNITA made concerted efforts to hide the extent of intervention by their foreign allies whilst trying to expose the assistance being received by their opponents. Then, after the event, both South Africa and Cuba justified its own intervention on the grounds of the other's involvement.

Although the war was extensively reported in the world media it possessed a certain 'Alice in Wonderland' quality.⁹⁶ Few correspondents saw both sides of the conflict, there was little front line coverage, and only a few seconds of film of the South Africans ever appeared. In December 1975, the *New York Times* explained: 'One of the more bizarre aspects of the war in Angola is that hardly anyone has seen it. Journalists have been kept away from all fronts by the three warring factions'.⁹⁷ The following month, Tom Lambert of the *Los Angeles Times* complained: 'A mixture of secrecy, propaganda, outright lies and obstruction from both sides has made coverage of the war a nightmare of frustration'.⁹⁸ Similarly Francois Campredon, of *Agence France Presse* claimed: 'Seldom has a war been kept so secret and journalists kept so far from the front as in the present Angolan civil war'.⁹⁹ This surreal quality was exaggerated by western journalists' dependence on sources in Lusaka, Kinshasa and Pretoria, which were consistently manipulated by false statements from the CIA.¹⁰⁰ Although the efforts of a few enterprising journalists gradually exposed the external intervention in Angola, the absence of reliable reports from the fighting fronts, of who was where and doing what, made it difficult to establish the precise chronology of Cuban and South Africa activity.

During the war itself South African leaders portrayed the Cuban and Soviet intervention in Angola as communist 'imperialism' that had to be combated. In November 1975, Botha replied to accusations in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda*: 'The Republic of South Africa is not bringing in Cubans to fight against the rights of two movements like the FNLA and UNITA in their own country. Russia itself has started, in conflict with the principle of peaceful coexistence, to employ militaristic imperialism towards Angola'.¹⁰¹ A week later Botha spoke of 'confusing propaganda' emanating from abroad which was designed to cloud the 'Russian-Cuban interference in the affairs of Angola'.¹⁰² Vorster claimed the Communists were aiming to create a string of Marxist states from Angola to Dar es Salaam, which endangered Zaire, Zambia, South

⁹⁵ Speech by Castro, 19 April 1976 quoted in Deutschmann, *Angola and Namibia*, p. 72.

⁹⁶ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 139.

⁹⁷ *New York Times*, 31 December 1975.

⁹⁸ 'Angola War: Secrecy and Propaganda', *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1976

⁹⁹ Francois Campredon, *Agence France Presse*, 21 January 1976.

¹⁰⁰ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 191-202.

¹⁰¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 22 November 1975.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 29 November 1975.

Africa and the Western World.¹⁰³ He stressed: 'It is very clear to one that the communist strategy for South Africa is to cause South Africa to fight simultaneously or as much as possible on three fronts, namely on the Mozambique, Rhodesian and Angolan front.'¹⁰⁴ The Foreign Minister, Hilgard Muller, accused Russia and Cuba of 'Red neo-colonialism in its most aggressive form'.¹⁰⁵ Vorster stressed that, 'There is no doubt at all that the strategy of the communists is world domination.'¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, 'As far as South Africa is concerned it is, as a result of its strategic situation and its industrial and mineral potential, a key factor in the conventional war which Russia is planning.'¹⁰⁷

The 'rooi gevaar', or red peril, was not a new refrain in South African politics. During the debate that followed South Africa's decision to participate in the Korean War, the Prime Minister, Dr. D.F. Malan, had proclaimed that it was South Africa's duty to side with the anti-Communist countries to combat 'aggressive communism' wherever necessary. As early as 1970 Vorster had declared that South Africa would not tolerate 'terrorism' or 'communist domination' (the former being seen as an instrument of the latter) in southern Africa and would fight it even beyond the country's border.¹⁰⁸ Five years later the government's *White Paper on Defence* warned: 'The threat to the R.S.A. within the ambit of the communist international battle for world domination is also related to the increase and establishment of communist influence and presence in Southern Africa'.¹⁰⁹

To what extent were Vorster and senior Nationalists justified in their fear of the 'communist menace'? The Soviet Union and its allies did indeed have close links with the African National Congress, which included communists in its ranks.¹¹⁰ Moscow provided military training and arms to South African guerrillas, and in Angola the Soviet Union and Cuba aided the MPLA. However, southern Africa was not a high priority on the Soviet agenda and the level of its aid was low. Moscow was more concerned with preserving its hegemony in Eastern Europe and increasing its influence in Southeast Asia and the Horn of Africa. Furthermore, black South Africans needed no foreign indoctrination in order to oppose apartheid.¹¹¹ In contrast to Pretoria's sweeping generalisations of Soviet policy, it could be argued that Moscow had a number of motives for its modest support to the MPLA: the need to impress other Communist nations, the

¹⁰³ Quoted in *The Star*, 10 December 1975. The Soviet's goal of 'a communist belt from the Atlantic Ocean, from Luanda across to Dar-es-Salaam on the Indian Ocean' is a claim Vorster repeated in Parliament: Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 366.

¹⁰⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 357.

¹⁰⁵ *The Star*, 20 December 1975.

¹⁰⁶ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 356.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 30 January 1976, col. 357.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 15 September 1970, col. 4208.

¹⁰⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, 1975* (Department of Defence, Pretoria, 1975), pp. 6-7.

¹¹⁰ The ANC sent a delegation to Moscow for talks in December 1974, the first time that an official meeting was publicised: C. Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa: How the Search for Peace Failed* (Rex Collings, London, 1976), p. 49.

¹¹¹ L. Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1990), p. 216.

urge to compensate for recent reverses in the Middle East and, perhaps most, importantly, the opportunity to score a point in their contest with the Chinese.¹¹²

Whether justified or not, by 1975 'communism' or 'Marxism' was *the* enemy in the minds of most white South Africans. They believed that the dangers that confronted them were imported from abroad¹¹³; the ANC was a communist organisation directed from Moscow and communists were responsible for internal black discontent.¹¹⁴ In February 1975 it was reported that since Portuguese authority had ended in Mozambique the number of firearm licences taken out in South Africa had increased by 57 percent.¹¹⁵ On 7 January 1976, special religious services were held in South Africa during which community prayers opposing communism were offered. White South Africans attended these services in large numbers.¹¹⁶ The threat of 'Soviet imperialism' looming over Africa was a constant feature in the news reports and editorial comment of South African newspapers. A series of political cartoons in *Die Burger* demonised Soviet military adventures in Africa. On the 22 October 1975, a watchdog was portrayed chasing a skunk back into Angola. The following day, Leonid Brezhnev was shown distributing guns to a row of Castro look-alikes with a caption reading: 'Africa for the African, but these expensive weapons are preferably only for you Cubans'.¹¹⁷ Although the South African press was prevented from publishing any news about South African involvement in Angola, news of the Soviet and Cuban menace did not require clearance from the military authorities. This resulted in an impression of a one-sided intervention, a picture of communist aggression, which accorded precisely with the government view. Where newspapers voiced objection to rumours of South African intervention, they did not dispute the communist menace but rather the appropriate response for South Africa.¹¹⁸ When Pretoria finally admitted limited involvement in Angola, it sought to present this as a justifiable reaction to communist intervention.

It was in January 1976, that Defence Minister Botha first publicly admitted that South Africa had played a role in the fighting in Angola. He told Parliament that during the pursuit of certain 'gangs' into Angola (presumably SWAPO), engagements had been fought with others: 'On various occasions the South African

¹¹² J. Marcum, 'Lessons of Angola', (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 54, No. 3, April 1976), p. 413. Colin Legum was one of the first scholars to focus on the impact of Soviet concern over China's successes in Africa. He claimed that 'What happened in Angola suggests that in the Third World the Sino-Soviet rivalry with each other has become more important to them than either's rivalry with the West': Legum, 'The Soviet Union, China and the West', pp. 751-752. Legum also stressed the Sino/Soviet rather than Soviet/US rivalry in Angola in 'A Letter on Angola to American Liberals'.

¹¹³ M. Arnheim, *South Africa after Vorster* (Howard Timmins, Cape Town, 1979), p. 111.

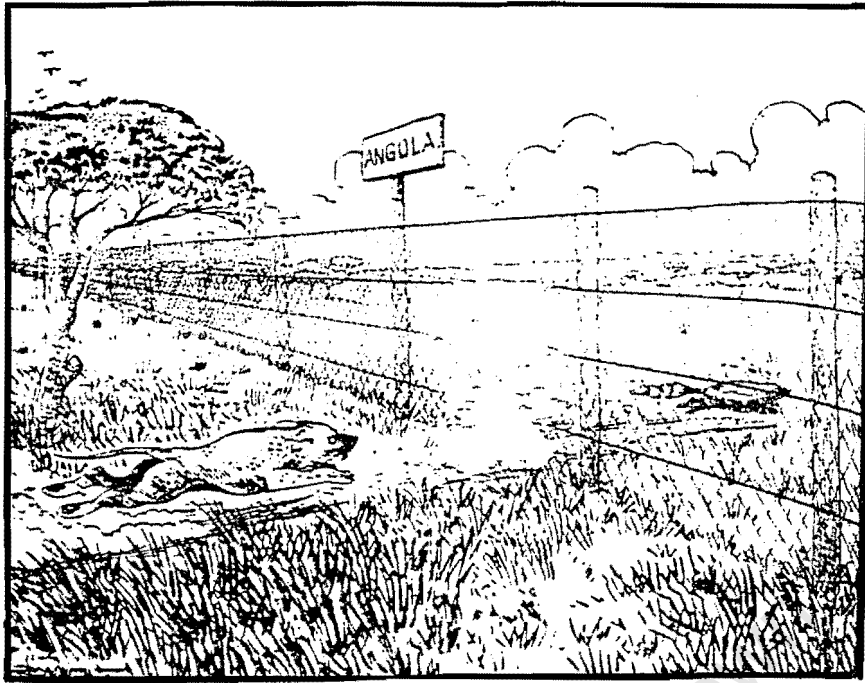
¹¹⁴ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 215.

¹¹⁵ *The Star* (weekly edition), 22 February 1975.

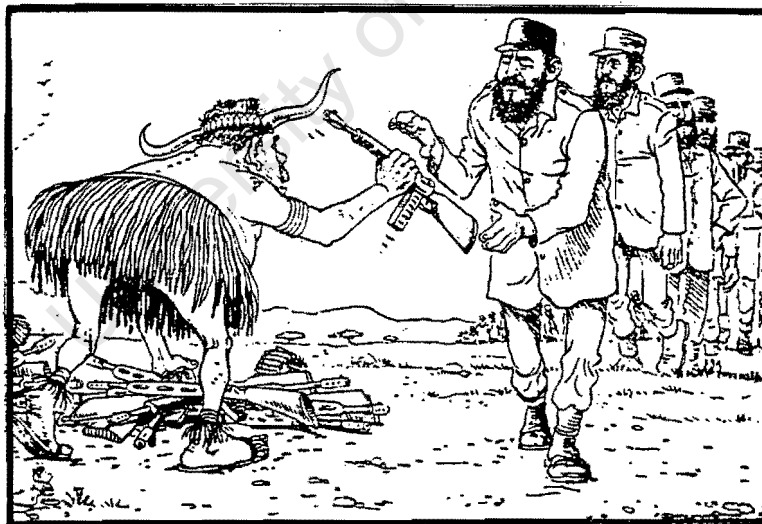
¹¹⁶ *South African Digest*, 23 January 1976; *Eastern Province Herald*, 6 January 1976; *Die Burger*, 6 January 1976; *Pretoria News*, 5 January 1976; *Die Transvaler*, 5 January 1976.

¹¹⁷ K. Vernon, *Penpricks: The Drawing of South Africa's Political Battlelines* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2000), pp. 124-125.

¹¹⁸ For example, the *Cape Times* warned that South African involvement in Angola could mean falling into a Russian trap, and so the civil war should not be an exception to the Republic's policy of non-interference. *Cape Times*, 26 November 1975.



Fred Mouton, *Die Burger*, 22 October 1975



'Africa for the African, but these expensive weapons are preferably only for you Cubans.'
Fred Mouton, *Die Burger*, 23 October 1975.

Figure 3: Political cartoons from *Die Burger*

[Illustrations taken from K. Vernon, *Penpricks: The Drawing of South Africa's Political Battlelines* (David Philip, Cape Town, 2000), pp. 124-125]

Defence Force had to pursue such gangs and clear away their camps. We did this with success. On occasion we were also involved in other engagements...We did this to protect White and Black Angolans from extermination by Russian-Cuban forces.'¹¹⁹ Soon after Vorster referred to 'the MPLA and the Cubans', whom the SADF had chased 'a very long way' from the Calueque dam.¹²⁰ Vorster and Botha still insisted that this did not amount to participation in the civil war. In an interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* in London Vorster stressed: 'I want to state very clearly that South Africa's involvement was not the cause of Russian and Cuban intervention but the effect of it.'¹²¹

After the war the South African press continued to carry vague reports of engagements fought between the SADF and Cubans. On 29 April 1976, SABC-TV (the state television service) screened a 'documentary' recreation of the 'Battle of Bridge 14'. Gordon Winter, a defector from the Bureau of State Security, claimed the film had been compiled by South African Military Intelligence.¹²² The hour-long 'Die Slag van Brug 14' was shot on location in Namibia with SADF troops playing all the roles. It portrayed a small SADF armoured car group, routing a numerically far superior force of Cubans at a strategic bridge somewhere in the Angolan heartland. Robert Moss later revealed that Bridge 14 was in the Catofe area, north of Santa Comba, and that the battle had been fought from 9-12 December 1975.¹²³ The film gave hero-status to one wounded white lieutenant who, after killing eleven black Angolans declared: 'I am not fighting for South Africa, but for Jesus Christ, against the anti-Christ forces of communism.'¹²⁴

Although the 'Battle of Bridge 14' was an inept propaganda re-enactment, television had only been introduced to South Africa at the start of the year and still had novelty value.¹²⁵ The press, starved of information, gave it sensational treatment and headlines were emblazoned with choice quotes from the heroes.¹²⁶ The film was shown in the week before the Parliamentary vote on the portfolio of the Minister of Defence and may have been calculated to restore public and press support for the Minister and his

¹¹⁹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 49.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 30 January 1976, cols. 368-369.

¹²¹ B.J. Vorster, 'Interview with the Prime Minister of South Africa, the Hon. B.J. Vorster, by Mr George Evans, of the *Sunday Telegraph*, London, on March 14, 1976', (*Southern African Record*, No. 5, July 1976), p. 28.

¹²² Winter, *Inside BOSS*, p. 543.

¹²³ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977. See Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 154-173; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 203-218.

¹²⁴ J. Laurence, *Race, Propaganda & South Africa: The Manipulation of Western Opinion and Politics by the Forces of White Supremacy* (Victor Gollancz, London, 1979), p. 173.

¹²⁵ South Africa's previous failure to introduce television was the result of Nationalist fears that it would create a cultural imbalance in favour of English-speaking South Africans, as initially programmes would have to be imported from English-speaking countries.

¹²⁶ Winter wrote: 'Many White South Africans fell for it. I was in Pretoria the day after that television documentary, and everywhere I went they were all saying "Yerrah, man. Our troops showed those MPLA kaffirs a thing or two, didn't they, man? Pity we had to leave. We could have killed them all off if we'd had just one more week"': Winter, *Inside BOSS*, pp. 543-544.

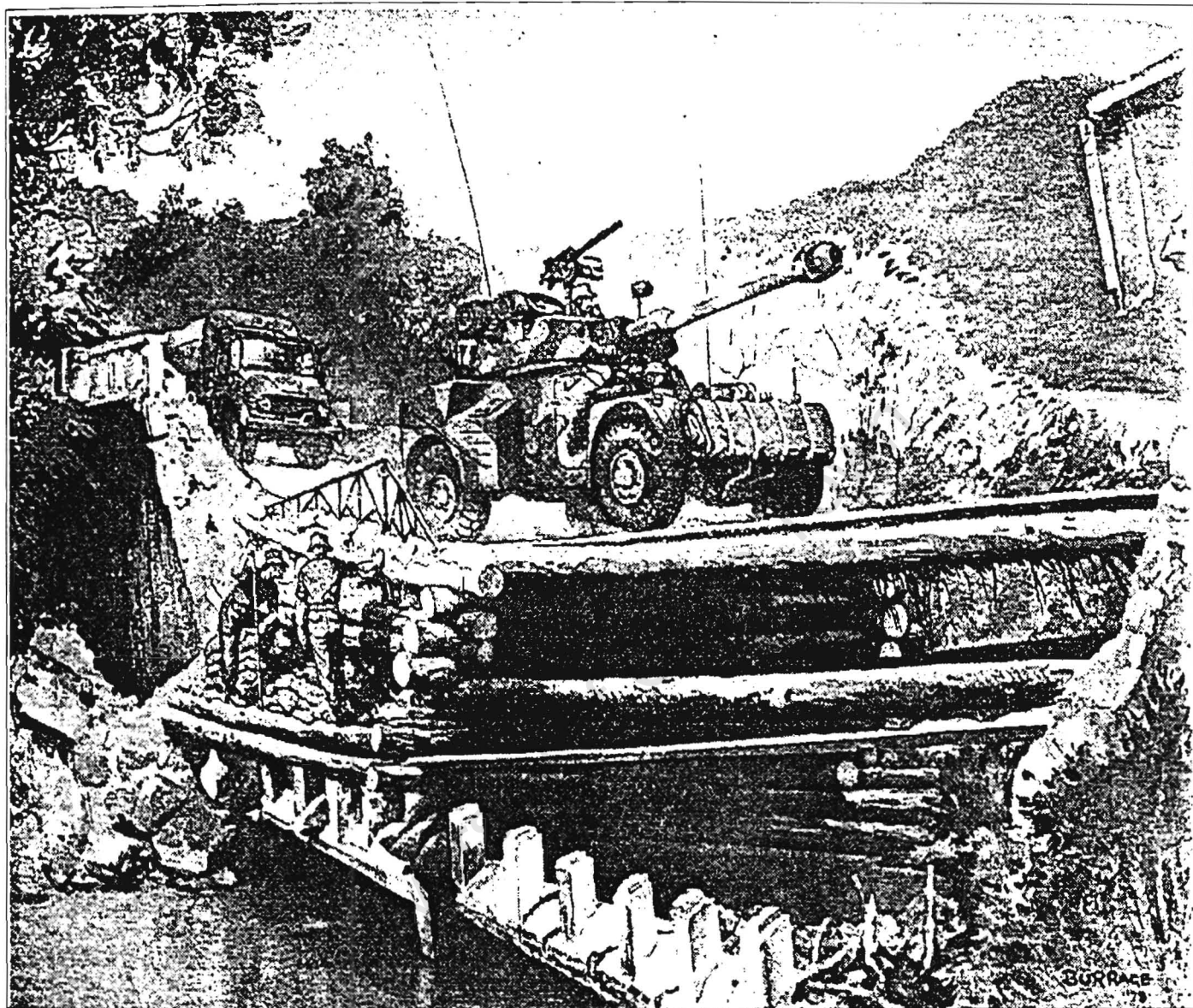


Figure 4: Artist's depiction of the 'Battle of Bridge 14'.

[S. Stander, *Like the Wind: The Story of the South African Army* (Saayman & Weber, Cape Town, 1985), p. 98]

department.¹²⁷ To coincide with the programme the SADF released details of the battle, claiming South Africa had dealt a demoralising blow to the Cuban troops, killing 400 MPLA and Cubans for only four South African deaths.¹²⁸ This was the first official admission of an active South African role in the Angolan civil war.¹²⁹ The film was originally made for overseas distribution, a decision questioned even by the pro-government newspaper, *Die Vaderland*, which pointed out that 'it would make it increasingly difficult to sell the story that we were only in the operational area to defend the Kunene water projects'.¹³⁰

Botha made his first definite statement about Cuban involvement in Angola to Parliament on 6 May 1976, in response to charges that South Africa's intervention had prompted that of the Soviets and Cubans. He stated: 'It is a well-known fact...that the Cubans, under Russian direction, began their infiltration there early last year. The Russians had begun a gradual build-up of the MPLA in Angola as far back as 1956. Since the beginning of 1975, armaments and ammunition were conveyed on a large scale to Angola. Large depots were also erected in Angola. This gentleman alleges that the Russian-Cuban intervention took place as a result of our participation there. But this is a lie.'¹³¹ In 1977, fronts for the Department of Information funded two books on the 'communist threat'. F. Metrowich's *South Africa's New Frontiers* included a chapter on Angola which described, 'The blatant and overt Communist intervention in an independent African state' and how 'South African forces were sent into Angola to protect South African interests there'.¹³² In *The Communist Challenge to Africa: An Analysis of Contemporary Soviet, Chinese and Cuban Policies*, Ian Greig claimed that Soviet and Cuban assistance to the MPLA 'posed the most serious questions for the future peace, not only of Africa, but of the whole world'. The introduction of South African forces in October was 'a bid to redress the balance now tilting so sharply in favour of a Communist victory'.¹³³

¹²⁷ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 48.

¹²⁸ See for example: *South African Digest*, 7 May 1976, p. 7; 'Die Werklike Brug 14! (The True Bridge 14), *Paratus*, 27 June 1976.

¹²⁹ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 222. It was also the first admission that South African troops had taken Cubans as prisoners of war. The three Cuban prisoners were not displayed to the press until 25 September 1976: 'The strange case of unbelieving Cuban POW's who read the Bible', *Paratus*, 28 January 1977, pp. 4-5.

¹³⁰ J. Burgess, E. du Plessis, R. Murray, P. Fraenkel, R. Harvey, J. Laurence, P. Ripken & B. Rogers, *The Great White Hoax: South Africa's International Propaganda Machine* (Africa Bureau, London, 1977), p. 13. The opposition United Party claimed the film should not be distributed overseas and criticised it, both for being contrived and, as a result of being only in Afrikaans, giving the impression that it was 'a unilingual war': Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, col. 6164.

¹³¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, col. 6210.

¹³² F.R. Metrowich, *South Africa's New Frontiers* (Valiant, Sandton, 1977), p. 89. Metrowich was the head of a front organisation called the Southern African Freedom Foundation and another government front, Valiant Publishers, published his book: Burgess et al., *The Great White Hoax*, p. 33; M. Rees & C. Day, *Muldergate: The Story of the Info Scandal* (Macmillan South Africa, Johannesburg, 1980), p. 202.

¹³³ I. Greig, *The Communist Challenge to Africa: An Analysis of Contemporary Soviet, Chinese and Cuban Policies* (Foreign Affairs Publishing Company, London & Southern African Freedom Foundation, Sandton,

The outline of the long-running debate over the chronology of South African and Cuban escalation was first sketched by the conflicting accounts released in early 1977 by Robert Moss and Gabriel Garcia Marquez. With the absence of concrete archival material in either South Africa or Cuba, subsequent scholars were forced to rehash existing accounts and, given the nature of the debate, many analyses were coloured by the writers' own political persuasions.

Marquez's account, published a few weeks before Moss', claimed that Cuban intervention occurred in response to the presence of South Africa and other Western interventionists. The chronology Marquez presented is as follows. In May 1975, Neto had talks in Brazzaville with a Cuban representative. He requested Cuban assistance in shipping arms into Angola and broached the possibility of wider aid. Three months later a Cuban delegation visited Luanda and Neto specifically requested military instructors. In early August, the Cubans decided to send 480 military advisers to the MPLA. The decision was made in light of Zaire's support for the FNLA, Zambia's support for UNITA and the fact that South African troops had crossed into Angola.¹³⁴ The Cuban instructors began arriving in Angola on 4 October and opened four training schools.¹³⁵ It was a South African attack on one of these training centres, at Benguela, on 3 November, which convinced the MPLA leaders that they were facing a full-scale war and would need outside help.¹³⁶ On 5 November the leadership of the Communist Party of Cuba decided to provide troops and equipment, the first contingent of which flew to Congo on 7 November.¹³⁷ Larger numbers of troops were sent on three ships and began arriving in Angola on 27 November.¹³⁸ Marquez stressed that the provision of combat troops, known as 'Operation Carlota', was 'a sovereign and independent act by Cuba' and that the Soviet Union was only informed afterwards.¹³⁹ Castro himself claimed that: 'On November 5, 1975, at the request of the MPLA, the leadership of our party decided to send with great urgency a battalion of regular troops with antitank weapons to help the Angolan patriots resist the invasion of the South African racists. This was the first Cuban troop unit sent to Angola... Cuba alone bears the responsibility for taking that decision. The USSR... never requested that a single Cuban be sent to that country.'¹⁴⁰

Robert Moss' account (which largely accords with the official SADF 1977 press release) stressed that South Africa had gone to the assistance of UNITA and the FNLA only after it became apparent that Cuban soldiers were entering the territory. Moss described Angola as 'one of the most brazen land-grabs that the Russians and their satellites have attempted'¹⁴¹ and portrayed Cuba as a Soviet proxy: 'The Cubans are

1977), pp. 246-247, 256. The Foreign Affairs Association was another front for the Department of Information: Rees & Day, *Muldergate*, p. 196.

¹³⁴ Marquez, 'Operation Carlota', in Deutschmann, *Angola and Namibia*, p. 42.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁰ Fidel Castro's speech on 19 April 1976 quoted in Deutschmann, *Angola and Namibia*, p. 71.

¹⁴¹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977.

Moscow's all-purpose mercenaries'.¹⁴² He stated that 'The Communist invasion of Angola was a step towards the fulfilment of Russia's grand design: the domination of the whole of southern Africa'.¹⁴³ Moss claimed that during the second half of 1974, the Russians shipped \$6million of arms to the MPLA and suggested, in August 1975, that the MPLA approach Cuba for troops. The Soviets agreed to bankroll the operation and to directly enter the conflict if the Americans did.¹⁴⁴ According to Moss western intelligence sources believed that Castro had already decided on a full-scale invasion before August 1975 when he was made aware of the possibility of South African intervention. Moss dated the first 200 Cuban instructors arriving in Angola 'two months in advance of the South Africans' and claimed that they were soon joined by combat troops. He stressed that Cuban troops were on the battlefield months before 5 November 1975, when Marquez dated the decision to commit Cuban troops.¹⁴⁵ Moss claimed that by 11 November there were at least 4,000 Cuban troops based in Luanda and so concluded that 'it is nonsense to make out that Cuba's decision to send in major combat units was taken only in early November, after South Africa's intervention'.¹⁴⁶

The SADF's official 1977 account mentioned the 'presence of Cubans supporting the MPLA' at the time of the mass refugee exodus across the border in August-September 1975. It claimed that the Defence Force first encountered evidence of a Cuban presence in Angola on early hot-pursuits when they 'came across Cuban ammunition and weapon dumps'.¹⁴⁷ The account did not mention where or when this find was made. According to both Moss and the SADF account, the first clash between South Africans and Cubans took place on 6 October when the SADF infantry instructors training UNITA troops at Silva Porto clashed with an MPLA/Cuban force, which was advancing on Nova Lisboa.¹⁴⁸ Botha's official biography claimed that it had been decided that the Defence Force personnel would man UNITA's armoured vehicles 'just this once'.¹⁴⁹

According to the SADF, after this encounter 'it became obvious that the struggle, with strong Cuban support, began to take on a conventional colour'.¹⁵⁰ Spies' account and Botha's biography also claim that it was this battle that made it clear that UNITA would not be able to resist the MPLA without help.¹⁵¹ The imminent victory of the MPLA forced South Africa to make a decision. The choice lay between active South African military participation on the one hand and, in effect, acceptance of an MPLA victory on the

¹⁴² Moss, 'Moscow's Next Target in Africa', *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 February 1977.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid..

¹⁴⁷ *SADF Statement*, 1977.

¹⁴⁸ Other accounts date the encounter as 5 October: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 82; Uys, *Cross of Honour*, p. 18. Uys does not mention the presence of Cubans.

¹⁴⁹ De Villiers, *PW*, p. 250.

¹⁵⁰ *SADF Statement*, 1977.

¹⁵¹ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 82; De Villiers, *PW*, p. 251.

other.¹⁵² Pretoria decided to escalate.¹⁵³ The instructors with UNITA requested reinforcements, prompting Pretoria to send a squadron of armoured cars with crews to join them at Silva Porto.¹⁵⁴ By late October, Commandant van der Waals had assembled the armoured cars and UNITA troops into a battle group, code-named 'Foxbat', which struck north and took up defensive positions in the Cela area. The political directive was that Foxbat should not go beyond traditional UNITA territory, and should be ready to withdraw on 11 November.¹⁵⁵ Meanwhile, on 14 October, a South African armoured column (named Zulu)¹⁵⁶, crossed into Angola from north-eastern Namibia and headed north-west deep into Angola. Tasked with gaining as much ground as possible in south-western Angola before 11 November, the South Africans advanced at full speed, sixty or seventy kilometres a day.¹⁵⁷

These were the two conflicting chronologies of escalation. The nature of international intervention in the Angolan civil war has been a fertile area of study, with scholars divided ever since. There is not space in this dissertation to delineate the full course of the debate, but two quotes from respected scholars of Angolan history are instructive. Colin Legum writing in late 1976 observed: 'The scale of the Soviet/Cuban intervention increased sharply in early October, three weeks before the South African forces entered Angola in any size... The Russian and Cuban contention that their military intervention was the result of the South African invasion is clearly an ex post facto rationalisation'.¹⁵⁸ John Marcum however stated: 'There can be quarrels over time sequences, but there is no question that Cuba's intervention was partly an improvised response to South Africa's'.¹⁵⁹

Closed official archives have hampered the furtherance of the debate about South African and Cuban escalation in Angola. Piero Gleijeses' recently published *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington and*

¹⁵² H.-R. Heitman, *The South African War Machine* (Presidio, Novato, California, 1985), p. 170.

¹⁵³ The SADF devised a four-phase operational plan for a military offensive, each stage was progressively more ambitious with the final phase providing for the capture of Luanda: Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁴ SADF Statement, 1977; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

¹⁵⁵ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977; De Villiers, *PW*, p. 254.

¹⁵⁶ Under the command of Colonel J.S. 'Koos' van Heerden, Zulu included Battle Groups Alpha (Bushmen trackers or *Flechas* under Commandant Delville Linford) and Bravo (the FNLA followers of Chipenda under Commandant Jan Breytenbach). Spies gives no figures for the number of South Africans initially in Zulu. Du Preez and Moss both mention 150: Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. 33; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

¹⁵⁷ See: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 86-95; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 65-72; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977; Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, pp. 22-42; Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, pp. 18-66; De Villiers, *PW*, pp. 251-254; I. Uys, *Bushman Soldiers: Their Alpha and Omega* (Fortress Publishers, Germiston, South Africa, 1993), pp. 28-31. Zulu made rapid progress through Pereira d'Eça, Roçadas (where it was joined on 20 October by four troops of armoured cars), and Sá da Bandeira before capturing Moçâmedes on 28 October 1975. After a fierce battle Benguela was taken and Zulu advanced to Lobito, where it remained until 11 November 1975 anticipating possible orders to retreat. When the column resumed its advance, capturing Novo Redondo on 13 November, it had covered 3,159 kilometres in 30 days: SADF Statement, 1977.

¹⁵⁸ Legum, 'The Soviet Union, China and the West', p. 751.

¹⁵⁹ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 275.

Africa, 1959-1976 is the first work to have been able to use Cuban archival material to trace the evolution of Cuban involvement in Angola. Gleijeses strongly challenges common perceptions of Cuban activity in Africa and claims that far from being the foot soldier of Soviet imperialism, Cuba intervened in Angola without seeking Soviet permission. More pertinent to this study, he insists that Cuban troops did not arrive in Angola until November.¹⁶⁰ He claims that 'the real power grab' occurred in mid-October when South Africa invaded Angola; Cuba then responded by sending troops.¹⁶¹

Gleijeses claims that in response to MPLA requests for economic aid, weapons and training¹⁶², Castro sent representatives in December 1974 to meet with Neto and to assess the situation in Angola.¹⁶³ However, Cuba was slow to get involved and it was only after further requests from the MPLA that Castro sent \$100,000 in July 1975.¹⁶⁴ Furthermore, it was not until August 1975 that Castro offered 480 Cuban instructors, these began arriving in Angola in late August and commenced training operations in mid-October.¹⁶⁵ On 23 October, the FNLA attacked one of the MPLA training camps¹⁶⁶ and 40 Cuban instructors with the MPLA helped resist the attack. According to Gleijeses, this was the first time that Cubans participated in actual fighting.¹⁶⁷ Gleijeses claims that Castro also considered sending troops to Angola in August 1975 but, when asked, Leonid Brezhnev refused to endorse the operation. It was only three months later, at the news of the South African invasion, that Castro made the difficult choice and sent Cuban troops to Angola, *without* consulting Brezhnev.¹⁶⁸ Gleijeses is adamant that the only foreign troops operating in Angola before the South African offensive began in mid-October were the Zaireans; the Cubans only followed in early November. Gleijeses concludes: 'The record is clear: it was the South African invasion that triggered the dispatch of Cuban troops'.¹⁶⁹ The fact that Gleijeses based his research on previously unseen material in the Cuban archives lends his work a certain credence lacking from previous accounts.

General Constand Viljoen, SADF Director of Operations at the time of Savannah, has claimed: 'It was clear to me the MPLA and Cubans were gradually occupying the whole of Angola.' General Hein du Toit, however, denies that South Africa even knew Cuba was sending troops to Angola at the stage when

¹⁶⁰ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 271-272. According to Gleijeses, Robert Hultslander, the CIA station chief in Luanda from early August to 3 November 1975 confirmed this.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 389.

¹⁶² The Soviets had offered training but insisted it take place in the Soviet Union. Consequently, in March 1975, 100 MPLA members left for Moscow: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 247-250.

¹⁶³ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 245-246.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, p. 257.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 256.

¹⁶⁶ This attack is also detailed in: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 132; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. 113.

¹⁶⁷ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 269.

¹⁶⁸ Until January 1976, all Cuban troops and weapons were transported to Angola on Cuban ships and Cuban planes without any Soviet involvement: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 379.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 352.

training was being discussed.¹⁷⁰ If Cuban involvement had been the paramount concern facing South Africa, it seems strange that du Toit, the director general of Military Intelligence, was unaware of it. Furthermore, it would appear that even the United States, which operated a far more sophisticated intelligence machine than South Africa, did not anticipate Cuban intervention. The United States Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, recalled in his memoirs that '[t]he intervention of Cuban combat forces came as a complete surprise'.¹⁷¹

So it is far from clear that South Africa's intervention was a reaction to the introduction of Cuban combat troops into Angola. Conversely, if Vorster did indeed believe that Angola was in the throes of a communist land-grab, would he have risked taking on the full might of 'the communists' without support? This brings us to a factor which the SADF omitted from their official account. South Africa invaded Angola in the belief that she had the support of both several moderate black African countries and, more importantly, the United States.

INTERNATIONAL ENCOURAGEMENT

'[T]he Angolan matter...is an exceptionally delicate matter. Even on this occasion there are certain things which I simply dare not say. South Africa's involvement was not an isolated involvement; others were also involved. I am not going to mention their names. It is not for me to do so. Everyone must speak for himself on this matter... I am prepared to stand up and be counted in regard to this matter. It goes without saying that, on the question of their involvement, those people should come forward themselves.'

(Vorster, speech to the House of Assembly, 30 January 1976)¹⁷²

Pretoria was discreet about its foreign partners in the Angolan venture. Speaking in Parliament on 26 January 1976 Botha claimed one of the reasons for South Africa's presence in Angola was diplomatic and could not be divulged.¹⁷³ The following day the Foreign Minister, Hilgard Muller, claimed, 'Wherever it was in any way possible we acted only after consultation with others, but in view of political and military aspects which not only affect us...but also affect many others, it is not in the general interest to say very much about this.'¹⁷⁴ In an interview published in *Newsweek* on 27 January 1976 Vorster first alluded to the fact that South Africa had not acted unilaterally in Angola. In a similar vein, quotes from Botha in the *Washington Post* on 3 February 1976, hinted at the encouragement Pretoria had received from unnamed African and other nations.

¹⁷⁰ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 24-25.

¹⁷¹ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 815.

¹⁷² Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, cols. 364-365.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, 26 January 1976, col. 53.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 27 January 1976, col. 114.

Robert Moss was less restrained in his account, which was nevertheless cleared for publication in South African newspapers: '[T]he key fact about South Africa's intervention was one that neither Mr Botha nor any other senior official in Pretoria has ever been prepared to discuss. It is that when South Africans went into Angola, they went in with the private blessing of many Western and black African Governments...'.¹⁷⁵

VORSTER'S SEARCH FOR DÉTENTE WITH BLACK AFRICA

'If there had been no détente, it is safe to say there would have been no South African penetration of Angola beyond the border zone'.
(John De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 76).

In May 1976, the South African Broadcasting Corporation's semi-official commentary *Current Affairs*, stated: 'South Africa had the capacity to make its intervention [in Angola] effective – to the extent of taking Luanda...Following urgent representations by black leaders, a column of our troops moved rapidly northwards'. In his book *Adeus Angola*, published later that year, Steenkamp claimed these black leaders were probably Mobutu of Zaire, Kaunda of Zambia, Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast, Senghor of Senegal, and possibly Seretse Khama of Botswana and Banda of Malawi. Steenkamp's book was passed for publication by the military authorities despite Pretoria's professed reticence on declaring who its supporters in Angola were. Steenkamp's description of how these black leaders 'saw the white states of the south as brothers – heartily disliked brothers, perhaps, but brothers all the same with whom to fight shoulder to shoulder against a new imperialism and an utterly alien ideology' was clearly acceptable.¹⁷⁶

It soon became received wisdom that Vorster's Angolan adventure had been part and parcel of his détente endeavours.¹⁷⁷ Détente was the end product of his 'outward policy' (described variously as 'outward movement' or 'outward-looking policy' and later as 'friendly co-existence', then 'dialogue', and at last 'détente'). In the late 1960s, whilst basking in confidence in its economic power and military strength, white South Africa was nevertheless facing growing international hostility, especially from independent black African states. Vorster's pragmatic response was his outward policy. Ostensibly based on economic assistance to moderate black states, it attempted to convey an image of South African non-interventionist, good-neighbourly benevolence.¹⁷⁸ Vorster wanted other African countries to soften their criticism of South Africa on the international stage and to reduce their hospitality to South African guerrillas in exile. The

¹⁷⁵ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

¹⁷⁶ Steenkamp, *Adeus Angola*, pp. 23–25.

¹⁷⁷ Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 19; A. Van Rensburg, *The Tangled Web: Leadership and Change in Southern Africa* (Hollandsch Afrikaanshe Uitgevers Maatschappij, Cape Town, 1977), p. 151; Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 151; De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 15.

¹⁷⁸ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 60.

reasoning behind the outward policy was that a rapprochement with black Africa was the key to an improvement in South Africa's foreign relations generally.¹⁷⁹

Despite a right-wing backlash in National Party circles the new initiative produced some promising early results. Botswana and Lesotho achieved independence in 1966, followed by Swaziland two years later. Their new moderate governments seemed to bode well for South Africa, if not for the normalisation of relations then, at least for the establishment of a *modus vivendi* with black Africa.¹⁸⁰ In 1967, Vorster met with Prime Minister Jonathan of Lesotho and, in 1970, with President Hastings Banda of Malawi.¹⁸¹ In August 1971, Banda made a much-publicised state visit to South Africa, the first of its kind by a black head of state.¹⁸² Further successes followed in the form of trade and economic agreements with the Malagasy Republic and an official visit by representatives from the Ivory Coast in 1971.¹⁸³ In 1974 Vorster met with President Felix Houphouët-Boigny of the Ivory Coast and Senegal's President Leopold Senghor, and early the following year he held secret talks with President William Tolbert in Liberia.¹⁸⁴

However, the Organisation of African Unity vigorously opposed Vorster's initiative. Ending colonialism and racial oppression had been an important impetus in the formation of the Organisation¹⁸⁵, and its Lusaka Manifesto of 1969 committed independent Africa to supporting the armed struggle against the white minority regimes in the south.¹⁸⁶ Consequently Vorster's brainchild never achieved as much as he'd hoped. Despite his painstaking preparation of his followers for the shock of black diplomats in Pretoria, in the event, only Malawi established diplomatic relations.¹⁸⁷ Although a number of black states accepted aid, none would be drawn into non-aggression pacts with South Africa and most insisted on confidentiality in their relations with the Republic.¹⁸⁸ An attempt to woo President Kaunda of Zambia, the lynchpin of central Africa, ended in failure in 1971 when Vorster, stung by Kaunda's public criticisms, published a series of confidential letters between them.¹⁸⁹

¹⁷⁹ D. Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government and South Africa's Foreign Relations', in R. Schrire (ed.), *Leadership in the Apartheid State: From Malan to De Klerk* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994), p. 269. Other writers have placed a greater emphasis on the economic incentive for Pretoria. For example: Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, pp. 46-66.

¹⁸⁰ Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 269.

¹⁸¹ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp. 34, 73; Geyser (ed.), *B.J. Vorster*, p. 11.

¹⁸² Geyser (ed.), *B.J. Vorster*, p. 11.

¹⁸³ Dalcanton, 'Vorster and the Politics of Confidence', p. 168.

¹⁸⁴ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 75 fn.34; De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 60; L. De Villiers, *Secret Information* (Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1980), p. 78; Van Vuuren, 'South Africa's Foreign Policy and International Practice, 1975', p. 193.

¹⁸⁵ A. Mazrui & D. Gordon, 'Independent African States and the Struggle for Southern Africa', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, p. 185.

¹⁸⁶ G. Cawthra, *Brutal Force: The Apartheid War Machine* (International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 1986), p. 139.

¹⁸⁷ J. Seiler, 'South Africa's Regional Role', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, p. 101.

¹⁸⁸ Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 270.

¹⁸⁹ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 60.

The disintegration of Portugal's African empire, and the concomitant collapse of South Africa's protective buffer to the north, radically changed the regional context and provided new impetus to Vorster's flagging 'outward' initiative. The instability in Rhodesia and Namibia assumed more ominous and urgent implications as Pretoria's buffers became liabilities. To secure South Africa's borders in the future and to move regional developments in a direction favourable to its interests, the Vorster government decided that it must intervene more directly in regional affairs. 'Détente', a term borrowed from the super-power context, was to be a more narrowly focused effort to consolidate South Africa's position in the region. Vorster began talking in more limited terms of a power bloc of independent states in southern Africa finding solutions to the area's conflicts. The essential objective of détente was to consolidate the regime's strategic position and to prevent it becoming still more isolated. Détente aimed to resolve the problems of Namibia and Rhodesia in South Africa's favour and re-establish some kind of *Pax Pretoriana* over the region.¹⁹⁰ In June 1974, Vorster publicly reversed Pretoria's long-standing position on Namibia, professing that South Africa had no wish to dictate the territory's future and that this might be best left to 'the peoples' concerned.¹⁹¹

The new phase began with a series of secret meetings with Zambian officials early in October 1974, in a joint effort to break the deadlock over Rhodesia.¹⁹² These resulted in dramatic conciliatory speeches. In a speech to the South African Senate on 23 October 1974, Vorster announced: 'Africa has been good to us and we are prepared, as far as it is within our capabilities, to give back to Africa. If asked, South Africa is prepared to play its part in contributing to order, development, and financial assistance to countries in Africa, particularly those that are prepared to stand closer to South Africa in a spirit of give and take.'¹⁹³ Two days later, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia in a speech at the University of Zambia, responded: 'This, I daresay, is the voice of reason for which Africa and the rest of the world has waited.'¹⁹⁴

This was to mark the start of steadily improving relations between Lusaka and Pretoria. However, despite South Africa's efforts to broaden the basis of détente, the essence of their mutual understanding remained confined to the search for a peaceful settlement in Rhodesia.¹⁹⁵ On 9 February 1975, Pretoria's foreign minister flew to Lusaka and met openly with Kaunda, the foreign ministers of Zambia, Botswana and Tanzania, and representatives of the Rhodesian guerrilla movements.¹⁹⁶ Vorster had to demonstrate his

¹⁹⁰ Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, pp. 23-25.

¹⁹¹ Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, p. 121.

¹⁹² Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 271.

¹⁹³ Vorster's speech to the Senate on 23 October was reported and discussed in the *Eastern Province Herald*, *The Star* and *Rand Daily Mail* on the following day.

¹⁹⁴ *Sunday Times*, 27 October 1974.

¹⁹⁵ D. Hirschmann, 'Southern Africa: Détente?', (*Journal of Modern African Studies*, Cambridge, 1976, Vol. 14, No. 1), p. 126.

¹⁹⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 11 February 1975.

willingness in helping to bring peace to Rhodesia.¹⁹⁷ Soon afterwards he put pressure on Ian Smith by confining the South African police in Rhodesia to barracks.¹⁹⁸ In return Zambia was to restrain guerrilla attacks in Rhodesia.¹⁹⁹ The high point of détente was the Victoria Falls conference of August 1975 when Vorster and Kaunda brought together members of the Rhodesian Front government and black nationalist leaders.²⁰⁰ Although heralded as something of a public relations coup in Pretoria and Vorster's finest hour in his guise as 'Africa's peacemaker',²⁰¹ with regard to the future of Rhodesia the conference was a failure. Vorster's meeting with Kaunda was considered a success simply because it had taken place.²⁰² Measuring by such a yardstick revealed the extent of South Africa's isolation.

Ian Smith's encounter with his black challengers at the Victoria Falls served only to strengthen his intransigence and his determination to resist Vorster's pressures to compromise. He tried to encourage the emergence of a pro-white Rhodesian backlash inside South Africa and urged Vorster's opponents to draw comparisons between the rivalries in the Angolan movements with events in Rhodesia. The Transvaal National Party Congress at the end of August showed Vorster still in a dominant position within his party. However, the feeling among the rank-and-file delegates reflected 'a vague uneasiness about the whole détente operation and about the ultra-conservative allegation that South Africa was "selling Rhodesia down the river"... Nationalists recognise that the situation is not an easy one and that their supporters must be delicately handled'.²⁰³

The OAU remained opposed to Vorster's appeals. At the OAU summit of April 1975, Zambia, Tanzania, Mozambique and Botswana were criticised for supporting South Africa's détente policies. The Dar es Salaam Declaration on Southern Africa called for the establishment of majority governments in Rhodesia and Namibia and the dismantling of apartheid: 'Africans cannot and will never acquiesce in the perpetuation of colonial and/or racist oppression in their continent. That is why any talk of détente with the apartheid regime is such nonsense that it should be treated with the contempt it deserves. For if the spirit of détente is to have any meaning at all, it must first and foremost be from within South Africa'.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁷ Heard, *The Cape of Storms*, p. 175, reporting Vorster's confidential briefing to political correspondents on 3 March 1975.

¹⁹⁸ South African Police units were first sent to Rhodesia in 1967. In March 1975, they were withdrawn from duty on the Zambezi to rear-area camps in Rhodesia: *Eastern Province Herald*, 18 March 1975. The following month it was announced that South Africa had agreed to withdraw all SAP units from Rhodesia before June 1975: *Eastern Province Herald*, 9 April 1975.

¹⁹⁹ J. Seiler, 'South African Perspectives and Responses to External Pressures', (*Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 1975), p. 463.

²⁰⁰ Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, pp. 23-25.

²⁰¹ O. Geyser, *Détente in Southern Africa* (Institute for Contemporary History, University of the Orange Free State, Bloemfontein, 1976), p. 37.

²⁰² J. Barratt, 'Southern Africa: A South African View', (*Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 55, No. 1, October 1976), p. 150.

²⁰³ *Rhodesia Herald*, 1 September 1975 quoted in Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, p. 26.

Vorster saw in Angola an opportunity to redeem his flagging détente initiative in the face of domestic right-wing opposition and doubts within black Africa. Both Zambia and Zaire, as neighbours to Angola, had already expressed their alarm at the prospect of an MPLA victory and Soviet influence in Angola.²⁰⁵ Zambia actively supported UNITA and Zaire the FNLA.²⁰⁶ Both were motivated to a certain degree by ideology, a desire to see a moderate regime in power in Angola and to limit Soviet influence in Africa. In an interview in 1976, Kaunda described the Soviet and Cuban intervention in Angola as ‘a plundering tiger and its deadly cubs coming in through the back door’. He continued: ‘We are a non-aligned nation and we spoke out plainly against the United States on Vietnam. Now we must be morally and politically courageous and tell the Soviets: “You are wrong”...And much as we condemn South Africa’s presence in Angola, we cheat ourselves if we think by condemning South Africa we are settling things. The South African presence, too, is an effect of the problem, not the cause.’²⁰⁷ Although Zambia and Zaire paid lip service to a government of national unity in Angola, economic exigencies meant they were primarily interested in seeing a friendly regime in power in Luanda. Both Zambia and Zaire were landlocked countries reliant on the Benguela railroad, which cut from east to west across Angola to the Atlantic port of Lobito, as an outlet to the sea for their vital copper exports.²⁰⁸

It seems unlikely that Kaunda and Vorster would have failed to discuss the situation in Angola during their meetings at the Victoria Falls Conference.²⁰⁹ Writing in early 1976, Colin Legum stated: ‘I am assured on the highest authority that President Kaunda, so far from encouraging South African intervention, did everything possible to discourage Mr. Vorster from the enterprise’.²¹⁰ Similarly Douglas Anglin and Timothy Shaw, in their study of Zambian foreign policy, asserted that ‘there is no evidence of any direct Zambia-South Africa collusion over Angola’.²¹¹ However, this is contradicted by a host of other writers all of whom claim that Kaunda urged Pretoria to intervene.²¹²

²⁰⁴ Quoted in Hirschmann, ‘Southern Africa: Détente?’, p. 107.

²⁰⁵ Zaire in particular feared being squeezed between two leftist governments in Congo and Angola: M. El-Khawas, ‘Power Struggle in Angola: Whose Struggle? Whose Power?’, (*Journal of Southern African Affairs*, Vol. 1, October 1976), p. 60.

²⁰⁶ M. Azevedo, ‘Zambia, Zaire, and the Angolan Crisis Reconsidered: From Alvor to Shaba’, (*Journal of Southern African Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 3, July 1977). Although a rather one-sided pro-MPLA account, Azevedo was one of the first writers to give serious consideration to the roles played by Zambia and Zaire in the Angolan conflict. He claimed that their involvement was substantial and helped to heighten the conflict, p. 276.

²⁰⁷ *Zambia Daily Mail*, 7 January 1976.

²⁰⁸ Brittain, *Hidden Lives*, p. 168.

²⁰⁹ D. Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention: From Local Bush War to Chronic Crisis in Southern Africa* (McFarland & Company, Jefferson, North Carolina, 1993), p. 207.

²¹⁰ *The Observer*, 22 February 1976.

²¹¹ D. Anglin & T. Shaw, *Zambia’s Foreign Policy: Studies in Diplomacy and Dependence* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colorado, 1979), p. 338.

²¹² Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 186; F. Bridgland, ‘The Future of Angola’, (*South Africa International*, South Africa Foundation, Vol. 19, No. 1, July 1988), p. 33; D. Fourie, ‘The Evolving Experience’, in J. Roherty (ed.), *Defense Policy Formation: Towards Comparative Analysis* (University of

Kaunda had been one of the earliest supporters of UNITA, but had expelled the movement from Zambia in 1969 following its acts of sabotage against the Benguela railway. Without the Benguela line, Zambia's expensive alternative was through Rhodesia and South Africa. Kaunda then supported the MPLA for a while and the movement established bases in Zambia.²¹³ His brief dalliance with the MPLA ended with the factional fighting between Neto and Chipenda, some of which had taken place inside Zambia.²¹⁴ Kaunda then switched his favour back to UNITA.²¹⁵ It was suggested at the time that perhaps Tiny Rowland, a British financier with a large economic stake in Zambia and a strong supporter of Savimbi, might have been of influence.²¹⁶ In April 1975, on a state visit to Washington, Kaunda appealed for American military aid on Savimbi's behalf.²¹⁷ According to John Stockwell (who headed the CIA's Angolan task force), in September 1975 Kaunda promised Savimbi that if UNITA could control the entire length of the Benguela Railroad by independence, it would receive Zambia's official support.²¹⁸ Savimbi later claimed that Kaunda arranged for him to meet Vorster for the first time on 10 November 1975, in order that he might personally request that the SADF remain in Angola after 11 November.²¹⁹ Officially, Kaunda denied doing so.²²⁰

The FNLA also had a leading African patron in Mobutu, who had long been its most committed backer.²²¹ In addition to his personal relations with Roberto and the tribal links between the Bakongo people in Angola and Zaire, Mobutu was motivated by Zaire's competition with Congo over the fortunes of Cabinda,

South Carolina, Durham, North Carolina, 1980), p. 104; Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 76. See also *The Times*, 17 February 1976.

²¹³ Azevedo, 'Zambia, Zaire, and the Angolan Crisis', p. 283; Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 7.

²¹⁴ Apparently Kaunda was particularly disturbed by the brutal murder of some of Chipenda's supporters by followers of Neto in August 1974 at an MPLA camp in western Zambia: Bridgland, 'Angola and the West', p. 119.

²¹⁵ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 236.

²¹⁶ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 60.

²¹⁷ Anglin & Shaw, *Zambia's Foreign Policy*, p. 329; A. Klinghoffer, *The Angolan War: A Study in Soviet Policy in the Third World* (Westview Press, Boulder, Colo., 1980), p. 89. According to *The Times*, 7 January 1976, Kaunda appealed to Ford 'to reverse what he considered to be a tide sweeping the MPLA to victory'.

²¹⁸ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 164. Indeed Savimbi did later specifically request that the South Africans help UNITA wrest the eastern section of the railroad from MPLA control. Although Luso (Luena) was successfully taken by the South African-led Battle Group X-Ray on 11 December 1975, its advance farther east was halted near the Zambian border: *SADF Statement, 1977*; Moss, 'Battle of Death Road', *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 219-232; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 186-201.

²¹⁹ Savimbi quoted in *The Guardian*, 16 February 1976; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977. Botha's official biography confirms the meeting on 10 November in Pretoria: De Villiers, *PW*, p. 255.

²²⁰ Anglin & Shaw, *Zambia's Foreign Policy*, p. 333.

²²¹ It has been alleged that in September 1974, Mobutu attended secret talks convened by Spinola in Cape Verde to discuss the situation in Angola. Mobutu and Spinola had hoped to exclude the MPLA by building a coalition between Roberto, Savimbi and Chipenda. The plan fell through when Spinola was forced to resign on 30 September and Portugal turned to an Angola policy including Neto: W. Minter, *Apartheid's Contrasts: An Inquiry into the Roots of War in Angola and Mozambique* (Zed Press, London, 1994), pp. 11-12.

an oil-rich enclave separated from the rest of Angola by a strip of Zaire.²²² Mobutu desired an Angolan government he could sway; if Roberto prevailed in Angola, Mobutu would have an opportunity to extend his influence over Angola and Cabinda, whilst if Neto won, Cabinda would be lost. Mobutu also feared that Angola, under the MPLA, might become a springboard for his archenemies, the Zairean rebels from Katanga province.²²³ After Moïse Tshombé's failed secession attempt in 1963, many of his gendarmes had been given refuge by the Portuguese in Angola. When these Katangese rebels joined the MPLA following the Lisbon coup, Mobutu increased his support and direct military assistance to the FNLA.²²⁴

Zaire was the first foreign country to send troops to Angola. They crossed the border into northwestern Angola in March 1975 and were fighting by the middle of the year.²²⁵ Zairean involvement in Angola was sporadically reported throughout the war and by August 1975 the *Washington Post* was claiming that 'Zaire is practically a party to the struggle'.²²⁶ According to Moss, at one stage Mobutu actually implored the South Africans to bomb northern MPLA positions.²²⁷ As previously noted Chinese instructors had been training FNLA troops in Zaire since 1974. It was also reported that Mobutu supplied the FNLA with North Korean instructors that had been attached to the Zairean army.²²⁸ It has been claimed that by the eve of independence, when three battalions of Zairean troops helped Roberto in his disastrous attempt to seize Luanda²²⁹, Zaire had 11,200 troops in Angola.²³⁰ In June 1975 Mobutu requested that the United States assist UNITA and the FNLA in their struggle against the MPLA.²³¹ Kinshasa then became the thoroughfare through which the CIA infiltrated arms and equipment to the two movements. In early 1976, Zaire became

²²² Both Congo and Zaire coveted Cabinda and supported rival separatist groups, which claimed to be the true Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC). Cuban troops and Soviet equipment were shipped to the MPLA through Brazzaville. Originally President Marien Ngouabi of Congo resented the MPLA's opposition to his designs on Cabinda but he eventually realised that an independent Cabinda was more likely to become Mobutu's puppet than his, and thereafter he fully backed the MPLA. Cuba had also promised him increased economic aid when he visited Havana in September 1975: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 262-264.

²²³ Mobutu's fears were realised when, in March 1977, between 800-1,500 armed Katangese exiles returned to their home province from Angola. Mobutu's regime was only saved by the efforts of Moroccan troops, French advisers and American financial aid: S. Weissman, 'The CIA and U.S. Policy in Zaire and Angola', in E. Ray, W. Schaap, K. van Meter & L. Wolf (eds), *Dirty Work 2: The CIA in Africa* (Zed Press, London, 1980), p. 176.

²²⁴ James, *A Political History of the Civil War in Angola*, p. 60.

²²⁵ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 351-352. According to Moss, the Zairean soldiers spent most of their time 'preying on the local girls', *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

²²⁶ *Washington Post*, 24 August 1975.

²²⁷ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977.

²²⁸ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 150.

²²⁹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977.

²³⁰ V. Brittain, *Death of Dignity: Angola's Civil War* (Pluto Press, London, 1998), pp. 2-3.

²³¹ In 1974 Mobutu, mired in an economic crisis caused by rampant corruption and a fall in the copper price, fell out with his American benefactors who refused him economic aid. With declarations of Zaire's 'active solidarity' with North Korea and professed joy at the communist victory in Vietnam, together with accusations of a CIA coup against him, Mobutu succeeded in regaining Kissinger's attention. When Mobutu requested that the US help Savimbi and Roberto, the Americans foresaw a joint endeavour that

the launch-pad for the ill-fated escapades of British and American mercenaries supporting the FNLA.²³² It has been alleged that, in order to convince Vorster to maintain his troops in Angola, Mobutu promised that Zaire would enter into a military cooperation agreement with South Africa and would seek support from the United States for such an arrangement.²³³

According to some writers the leaders of Senegal and the Ivory Coast also encouraged South African intervention in Angola, however, the evidence is less convincing than for Zambia and Zaire. Stockwell mentioned only that Savimbi had invited the South Africans into Angola after conferring with Mobutu, Kaunda, Houphouet-Boigny and Senghor.²³⁴ Eschel Rhoodie, Secretary for Information at the time, later claimed that Prime Minister James Mancham of the Seychelles had told him that both Senghor and Houphouet-Boigny had sent urgent messages to Vorster urging him to act swiftly and strongly and take Luanda.²³⁵ After the crisis was over, Zambia and Zaire each piously and very publicly denied that they had ever encouraged South African intervention in Angola. However, in February 1976, Savimbi declared that South Africa had received prior approval from Zambia, Zaire and the Ivory Coast. He also claimed that the South African government had acted 'painfully' correctly.²³⁶

Vorster believed that Angola was an opportunity to prove that South Africa was a reliable ally of black states opposed to communist intervention.²³⁷ It was a chance to demonstrate that South Africa was willing to expend lives and money for a common cause with fellow African nations. To Vorster the appeals from these black leaders 'were more than pleas for greater South African involvement, they were the siren song inviting him across the African colour bar'.²³⁸ In November 1975, a South African newspaper predicted:

'Our involvement will be utterly defensible in the Western world. We will be fighting alongside Africa, for Africa. We will be paying in blood our membership dues to join the community of African nations. In this sense, there is no easy validity in some overseas comment that our role in Angola, present or future, will prejudice détente. If anything it should strengthen the new and fragile links that hold the détente policy together'.²³⁹

The aim of the intervention, to see a government in power which would adopt an accommodating approach towards South Africa, was in keeping with the basic tenets of Vorster's détente policy. A senior

would re-establish US-Zairean relations and approved a \$50million assistance package for Mobutu: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 287-290.

²³² Brittain, *Hidden Lives*, p. 162.

²³³ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 41.

²³⁴ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 186.

²³⁵ E. Rhoodie, *The Real Information Scandal* (Orbis SA, Pretoria, 1983), p. 142.

²³⁶ Interview with Savimbi published in *The Star*, 15 February 1976; *Rapport*, 15 February 1976.

²³⁷ Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 272.

²³⁸ Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 219.

²³⁹ *The Star*, 22 November 1975.

government official told the political commentator John De St Jorre in November 1976 that, 'If Savimbi had won South Africa would now be a member of the Organisation of African Unity.'²⁴⁰ The Defence Force was not unaware of Vorster's political and diplomatic goals.²⁴¹ Colonel Jan Breytenbach recognised: 'Several African states asked South Africa for help. We were the polecat of the world, especially with regards to the African countries. So it was a way to get friends.'²⁴² When General Constand Viljoen gave a confidential briefing to South African newspaper editors during the war the mood was 'euphoric': 'This was not only a military success, we were told, but a foreign-relations breakthrough, and a breakthrough in Africa as well. Some of those involved with South Africa were African leaders. New relationships were being established. It was a wonderful opportunity'.²⁴³ General Viljoen has subsequently elaborated:

'I got the impression from P.W. Botha and Vorster that they saw the request from black Africa as a sign of a breakthrough. It was a very important development because, ever since we'd been involved with the Rhodesian situation, and because of the assistance we gave to the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola, it had become clear to us in the military that the real issue for us would be to become part of Africa. The opinion-makers regarded this as a breakthrough. South Africa was starting to side with black Africa instead of the colonial powers. This was perhaps the most important reason for participating in the whole effort, apart from the idea of combating communism.'²⁴⁴

UNITED STATES AND 'THE WEST'

'Against which neighbouring states have we ever taken aggressive steps? I know of only one occasion in recent years when we crossed a border and that was in the case of Angola when we did so with the approval and knowledge of the Americans but they left us in the lurch. We are going to retell that story. The story must be told of how we, with their knowledge, went in there and operated in Angola with their knowledge, how they encouraged us to act and, when we had nearly reached the climax, we were ruthlessly left in the lurch by an undertaking that was broken.'

(P.W. Botha, *House of Assembly Debates*, 17 April 1978)²⁴⁵

At an off-the-record press briefing during the war, Botha hinted that South Africa's intervention in Angola was supported by the United States. 'We're not in it alone,' he told the gathered reporters, 'You'd be

²⁴⁰ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 76.

²⁴¹ There were sketchy allegations that South Africa had been covertly involved in an earlier foreign military conflict for much the same reasoning. Eschel Rhoodie claimed that Military Intelligence saw in the Biafran war (1967-70) an opportunity for South Africa to establish a diplomatic foothold in the heart of Africa. Vorster accordingly supplied the Biafrans with clandestine military support in the form of arms and a small number of military advisers: Rhoodie, *The Real Information Scandal*, pp. 95-96.

²⁴² Interview with Jan Breytenbach.

²⁴³ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, p. 306.

²⁴⁴ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 15.

surprised to know who's in it with us.'²⁴⁶ By late February 1976, the tone had changed. The United Party in Parliament referred to 'the prevailing acidness which has become evident on the Government side over what the role of the United States was supposed to have been or should have been in Angola.'²⁴⁷ Asked by *Newsweek* magazine in May 1976, whether Washington had 'solicited' South Africa's help in Angola, Vorster replied, '...if you are making the statement, I won't call you a liar.'²⁴⁸ In 1977, Robert Moss stated that South Africa 'went in with the encouragement of Dr Kissinger, who offered American guarantees that, in the event, he was unable to fulfil'.²⁴⁹ Botha's official biography claimed: 'As American covert involvement in the Angolan conflict increased, South African involvement also increased... America was involved on a large scale in South Africa's intervention in Angola'.²⁵⁰ Roelof (Pik) Botha, who was Pretoria's Ambassador to the United States at the time was more explicit in a 1999 television interview: 'The United States, at the highest level, requested assistance, or rather requested South Africa to go in and assist UNITA.'²⁵¹ General Hein du Toit has claimed that, 'American senators gave us promises. They told Pik Botha that they were behind us. General [Brent] Scowcroft, the security advisor to the President, was the name that was mentioned.'²⁵²

As might be expected, Cuba and the Soviet Union professed the view that there had been an American-South African conspiracy with regards to Angola.²⁵³ Castro claimed that South Africa's invasion in October had been 'instigated by the United States'.²⁵⁴ The extent to which South Africa was an American proxy became a persistent theme of Soviet propaganda. For example, a statement by the *Tass* news agency in January 1984 compared South Africa's intervention in Angola with Israel's in the Lebanon and insisted that both were part of a wider imperialist conspiracy. It claimed that neither would have intervened so decisively 'without the support and encouragement of Washington'.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁵ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 17 April 1978, col. 4852.

²⁴⁶ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, p. 306. Sparks was the editor of the *Sunday Express* and attended the briefing.

²⁴⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 20 February 1976, col. 1666.

²⁴⁸ *Newsweek*, 17 May 1976, p. 53. Vorster later denied the statement and the reporting journalist was banned for life from visiting South Africa.

²⁴⁹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

²⁵⁰ Prinsloo, *Stem uit die Wilderness*, p. 65.

²⁵¹ CNN, Cold War, script of episode 17, 'Good Guys, Bad Guys', 14 February 1999 quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 298.

²⁵² Telephone interview with General Hein du Toit. Pik Botha was indeed sent to the White House to request 'firm assurances...that they [the South Africans] would be assisted' if the fighting escalated: Hyland, *Mortal Rivals*, p. 146. Hyland was the deputy to head of the National Security Council, Scowcroft. It appears that, following his meetings with Kissinger and Scowcroft, Pik Botha relayed somewhat mixed messages to Pretoria about the way the wind was blowing in the United States: Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 40.

²⁵³ Neto's official biographer later wrote: 'The FNLA and UNITA attack on the MPLA, and foreign military intervention in Angola were part of a long-term plan on the part of reaction, in which the main roles belonged to the USA, Western Europe, Zaire and South Africa': A. Khazanov, *Agostinho Neto* (translated into English by Cynthia Carlile) (Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1986), p. 221.

²⁵⁴ Speech by Fidel Castro, 19 April 1976 quoted in Deutschmann, *Angola and Namibia*, p. 70.

²⁵⁵ Quoted in C. Coker, *South Africa's Security Dilemmas* (Praeger, New York, 1987), p. 72.

During the war American official spokesmen specifically denied that there was any coordination with, or undertakings to, South Africa over Angola, or even any approval of South African actions there. At the start of December 1975 the State Department stressed that the United States was in no way implicated in the South African intervention: 'We have seen press reports alleging South African activities in support of the non-MPLA forces in Angola, but we have not initiated any discussions or consultations with the South African Government on Angola and we have no plans to do so. We continue to believe that the Angolan people should be left free to resolve their own differences without outside interference'.²⁵⁶

Following the war, the Ford administration stoutly maintained that there had been absolutely no cooperation between the United States and South Africa. On 29 January 1976, Kissinger claimed that South Africa had sent military equipment and personnel to UNITA in September 1975 'without consultation with the United States'.²⁵⁷ He continued: 'Some charge that we have acted in collusion with South Africa. That is not true. We had no foreknowledge of South Africa's intentions, and in no way cooperated with it militarily. Nor do we view South African intervention more benevolently than we do the intervention of other outside powers'.²⁵⁸ On 3 February 1976, Robert Ellsworth, the new Deputy Secretary of Defence, claimed that the eleven American representatives at the Defence Attaché's Office in South Africa had not even shared information or analysis on Angola with the South African military.²⁵⁹ In response to questioning about American and South African coordination over their Angolan policies, Ellsworth replied: 'There has been no coordination that I am aware of, certainly none on the military level'.²⁶⁰

There were, however, some renegade voices in Washington. Called before the Senate as an expert on Angola, the historian John Marcum commented: 'One of the points I found curious was a public statement by the State Department that it did not consult with the South Africans, that it was not informed of the intervention. And I presume it did not suggest to the South Africans that intervention would not be a good thing; it saw no evil, heard no evil, stayed away from it, which is in itself a kind of complicity'.²⁶¹ Senator John Tunney was more forthright. On 6 February he told the Senate that there had been American 'tacit, if not explicit, support of South African intervention.' He commented: 'For Dr Kissinger to tell this

²⁵⁶ Department of State, 'Press Briefing Paper', 1 December 1975 quoted in Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, pp. 441-442 fn.235.

²⁵⁷ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 10.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 13. In his memoirs, Kissinger was even more specific in maintaining his innocence. He claimed that he had only learnt of the South African invasion at the end of October, two weeks after it had begun: Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 820. William Colby, the director of the CIA, also denied that there was any cooperation with South Africa. He maintained that the CIA 'stayed well away from' all South African activities in Angola: Colby, *Honorable Men*, p. 422.

²⁵⁹ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 77.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 78.

²⁶¹ Ibid, p. 130.

committee, as he did last week, that the administration had no foreknowledge of South African involvement, seems a little bit less than frank. It seems to me that there is semantic juggling of the actual facts in his statement.'²⁶² The new Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, William Schaufele, displayed further juggling when asked whether the United States had approved of South African intervention in Angola, he replied: 'It was not approval, so much, as that we could understand South Africa's perception of its role.'²⁶³ The nature of American-South African cooperation was expressed in equally vague terms by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, American ambassador to the United Nations. Admitting that there was a 'convergence in policy' between the two governments but denying any coordination of operations, he added, 'We are doing the same thing, sort of.'²⁶⁴

Due to the revelations of Congressional inquiries in early 1976, the chronology of American involvement in Angola is much easier to identify than that of the Cubans or South Africans. The coup in Lisbon had been unexpected²⁶⁵ and thrown the whole basis of American policy in southern Africa into disarray. In its report to Congress in January 1976 the Pike Committee (the United States House of Representatives Select Committee on Intelligence chaired by Congressman Otis Pike) claimed that 'The April 1974 coup in Portugal caught the United States by surprise, without graceful policy alternatives and out of contact with the African Revolutionaries'.²⁶⁶ The Nixon administration's desire for a stable status quo in Africa, belief in the future of the white regimes and underestimation of black African resolve had led to a 'tilt' toward the Portuguese, Rhodesians and South Africans in their struggle against African nationalism.²⁶⁷ Traditionally the United States supported Portugal as a fellow NATO power and as the provider of a vital mid-Atlantic refuelling stop in the Azores.²⁶⁸ Following the transition from Nixon to Ford, America had been preoccupied with Watergate and the war in the Middle East. When the Ford administration did begin to focus on the impact of the Lisbon coup, its attention concentrated on the drift to the left in Portugal itself.

²⁶² Ibid, pp. 164-166.

²⁶³ *To the Point*, 20 February 1976.

²⁶⁴ Statement by Moynihan, 14 December 1975, quoted in the *Washington Post*, 15 December 1975. On 4 February 1976, the *Washington Post* quoted 'informed sources in Cape Town' who claimed that Moynihan had secretly conveyed to Pik Botha, South Africa's ambassador at the UN, 'encouragement' from the US government for South Africa to intervene in Angola.

²⁶⁵ Hyland, *Mortal Rivals*, p. 131. The CIA relied on perfunctory coverage of Angola from its station in Lisbon, which in turn relied on Portuguese intelligence: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 278.

²⁶⁶ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 11.

²⁶⁷ This line of thought had been laid out in the National Security Study Memorandum No. 39 of 1970 colloquially known as the 'Tar Baby' report. It was predicted that the whites in southern Africa would probably retain power in perpetuity and so it was preferable that the United States work through them. See: M. El-Khawas & B. Cohen (eds), *The Kissinger Study of Southern Africa* (Lawrence Hill & Co., Westport, Conn., 1976).

²⁶⁸ G. Wright, *US Policy Toward Angola: The Kissinger Years, 1974-76* (University of Leeds, Leeds, 1990), p. 2; P. Schraeder, *United States Foreign Policy toward Africa: Incrementalism, Crisis and Change* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), p. 28.

When Kissinger finally turned his attention to Angola he saw the conflict there solely in terms of global politics, in terms of East and West.²⁶⁹ Most American commentators interpreted the Soviet intervention in Angola as an extension of Soviet competition with the West into Africa, and saw the MPLA solely as an instrument of Soviet ambition and Cuba as a Soviet proxy.²⁷⁰ It is unclear whether Kissinger sincerely believed that a Soviet power grab was occurring, but either way, in the wake of Vietnam, he seized on Angola as an opportunity to regain credibility on the global stage.²⁷¹ Kissinger professed that Leonid Brezhnev, heady with the recent communist military victories over American clients in Indochina, saw Angola as a chance to strike an economic and strategic blow to the West. Pretoria's version of events coincided with the American stance that depicted the war in Angola as a challenge by an expansionist Moscow. Botha's official biography states: 'Reacting to Soviet aid to the MPLA and later Cuban military involvement, the USA started clandestine aid to the MPLA's opponents in 1975'.²⁷²

Angola was to become the CIA's largest military intervention in Africa since the Belgian Congo crisis of the early 1960s. On 22 January 1975, the 40 Committee (the top-level intelligence review board, a subsidiary of the National Security Council, that approved all covert action programmes) authorized an ad hoc payment of \$300,000 to the FNLA, to be used for non-military activities. A proposal to give Savimbi \$100,000 was rejected.²⁷³ On 18 April 1975 Kaunda arrived in Washington for a two-day state visit during which he appealed for aid on Savimbi's behalf.²⁷⁴ At Kissinger's request a National Security Council interagency task force on Angola was established. It was chaired by Nathaniel Davis, the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at the State Department, and proposed three possible American policies towards Angola: neutrality, diplomatic/political measures to promote a peaceful solution, or active support of one or more of the liberation movements.²⁷⁵ The African specialists in the State Department favoured a diplomatic offensive to support the OAU in its quest for an African solution and to build support for an all-

²⁶⁹ Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975', p. 124; Wright, *The Destruction of a Nation*, p. 57.

²⁷⁰ In contrast it could be argued that the Soviets, eager not to derail an easing of tension with Washington, intervened in Angola slowly and reluctantly. Gleijeses has claimed that Soviet aid to the MPLA only began in early 1975, and in August, despite the evidence of growing external support for the FNLA and UNITA, Brezhnev rejected Castro's proposal for the dispatch of Cuban troops: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 389.

²⁷¹ W. Isaacson, *Kissinger: A Biography* (Simon and Schuster, New York, 1992), chapter 30; G. Treverton, *Covert Action* (Basic Books, New York, 1987), pp. 153-154. Ford's use of military force to recapture the U.S.S. Mayagüez off the coast of Cambodia in May 1975 had also been an attempt to prove American resolve: C. Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only: Secret Intelligence and the American Presidency from Washington to Bush* (Harper Collins, London, 1995), p. 408; R. Massie, *Loosing the Bonds: The United States and South Africa in the Apartheid Years* (Doubleday, New York, 1997), p. 379. There is also an intriguing thesis that Kissinger's move in Angola was really intended to placate the Chinese, allaying their suspicion that the United States was becoming too accommodating towards the Soviets: R. Lemarchand, 'The CIA in Africa: How Central? How Intelligent?', (*Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 1976), p. 408.

²⁷² Prinsloo, *Stem uit die Wilderness*, pp. 64-65.

²⁷³ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 283. Stockwell puts the amount given to the FNLA at \$265,000: *In Search of Enemies*, p. 55.

²⁷⁴ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 285.

party coalition government.²⁷⁶ However, Kissinger overruled all opposition to covert action and won the approval of the president.²⁷⁷ On 18 July Ford authorised the disbursement of \$6million to Roberto *and* Savimbi (followed by another \$8million on 27 July and \$10.7million on 20 August).²⁷⁸ The following month Nathaniel Davis resigned in protest from his post as Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs.²⁷⁹ But the CIA covert operation in Angola, dubbed IAFeature, had begun. On 29 July the first planeload of arms for UNITA and the FNLA left the United States for Kinshasa.²⁸⁰ As chief of the CIA Angola task force, Stockwell was instructed to 'prevent an easy victory' by the MPLA.²⁸¹ However, Stockwell believed that IAFeature would prove too small to be effective but too large to be kept secret.²⁸²

Following Angolan independence, on 14 November the 40 Committee instructed the CIA to design a programme capable of overthrowing the MPLA regime in Luanda. In the meantime, it recommended that the last \$7 million in the agency's contingency reserve fund be spent in Angola, thus bringing the total budget for Operation IAFeature to almost \$32 million.²⁸³ However, when the CIA presented the 40 Committee with programmes costing up to an additional \$100 million, it hesitated to recommend massive new expenditure.²⁸⁴ Senator Dick Clark, as Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on African Affairs, had travelled to southern Africa in August 1975. He returned from the trip sceptical of his CIA briefings and of the Angolan programme. He was concerned that the CIA was secretly dragging the United States into a broad conflict with global implications. He was specifically concerned that arms were being sent directly into Angola, that American citizens were involved in the conflict and that the CIA was illegally collaborating with South Africa.²⁸⁵ On 5 December 1975, Clark recommended to the Foreign Relations Committee that it vote to terminate United States involvement in Angola.²⁸⁶ On 19 December the

²⁷⁵ Ibid, pp. 286-287; Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, p. 411.

²⁷⁶ Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 356.

²⁷⁷ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 154.

²⁷⁸ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 47, 55, 162; Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 293.

²⁷⁹ On 16 July, Davis had warned Kissinger: 'We have evidence the Soviets are introducing more, heavier and more sophisticated weapons [into Angola].... If it were not true before, it seems clear that it is now unrealistic to think in terms of a program that could be both effective and covert': Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975', pp. 114-116. Ironically, Davis' appointment in March 1975 had aroused fears of more active American intervention (Davis had been ambassador to Chile during the coup that overthrew President Salvador Allende) and had provoked an unprecedented protest from the OAU.

²⁸⁰ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 58.

²⁸¹ Ibid, p. 45.

²⁸² Ibid, p. 68.

²⁸³ Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, p. 416. Stockwell puts the amount at \$31 million: *In Search of Enemies*, p. 272. The actual amount of American assistance to the FNLA and UNITA could have been as much as double the figure of \$32 million eventually acknowledged as the CIA systematically undervalued the cost of the materiel that it provided: Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 263.

²⁸⁴ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 21.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 229. See also: D. Clark, 'An Alternative U.S. Policy', (*Africa Report*, Vol. 21, No. 1, Jan/Feb 1976), pp. 16-17.

²⁸⁶ National Security Archive, *South Africa: The Making of US Policy, 1962-89: Guide and Index* (Chadwyck-Healey, Alexandria, Va, 1991), p. 117. It has been alleged that the South African Department

Senate voted 54-22 to cut off further covert assistance to the FNLA and UNITA.²⁸⁷ Ford and Kissinger were furious that Congress had 'pulled the plug' on American involvement in Angola. Ford said Congress had 'lost their guts'.²⁸⁸ For the first time in American history, a president had been forced by Congress to stop a covert operation abroad to which he was personally committed.²⁸⁹ The House of Representatives endorsed the ban on aid to Angolan combatants by a 323-99 vote on 27 January.²⁹⁰ The ban on CIA operations in Angola became law on 9 February 1976.²⁹¹

Some writers have assumed that South Africa and America cooperated in Angola. In 1980, Donald Woods, who had been the editor of the *Daily Dispatch*, wrote: 'On the advice of America's Central Intelligence Agency and, it was rumoured, with the encouragement of US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Botha became convinced that of the three liberation movements contending for power in Angola...the least desirable and the most socialist, from South Africa's point of view, was Agostinho Neto's MPLA. So he sent the South African army in to help Holden Roberto's FNLA and Jonas Savimbi's UNITA forces'.²⁹² Allister Sparks claimed: 'secret negotiations were held with South Africa, which was persuaded to intervene in support of Savimbi in the south'.²⁹³ More recently, Chris Alden referred to 'the joint American-South African campaign to thwart the MPLA's ambitions'.²⁹⁴ Victoria Brittain commented on 'US promises to the South Africans that Washington was committed to backing their invasion with continued military support for the anti-MPLA forces'²⁹⁵ and in a subsequent book claimed: '[T]he Americans gave the nod to Pretoria to mount an ambitious military adventure over the Namibian border in support of its two Angolan proxies'.²⁹⁶ However, few of these writers gave evidence to back up their claims.

Top-level military contacts between the United States and South Africa followed close on the tail of the Lisbon coup. Within weeks of Caetano's overthrow, Chief of the SADF Admiral Hugo Biermann visited Washington and met both the Secretary of the Navy and the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.²⁹⁷ A

of Information financed plots to ensure Senators Dick Clark and John Tunney (who was also a vocal opponent of IAFeature) were not re-elected: Rhoodie, *The Real Information Scandal*, p. 174.

²⁸⁷ Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, p. 417.

²⁸⁸ *New York Times*, 11 February 1976 quoted in T. Franck & E. Weisband, *Foreign Policy by Congress* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979), p. 46.

²⁸⁹ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, pp. 345-346.

²⁹⁰ *Washington Post*, 28 January 1976.

²⁹¹ However, George Bush, who had replaced William Colby as Director of Central Intelligence, refused to rule out the possibility that American intelligence forces would continue to provide aid to anti-MPLA forces: Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 445 fn.289.

²⁹² Woods, *Asking for Trouble*, p. 254.

²⁹³ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, p. 304.

²⁹⁴ C. Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand: The Rise and Fall of the South African Security State* (Macmillan Press, London, 1996), p. 25.

²⁹⁵ Brittain, *Hidden Lives*, p. 50.

²⁹⁶ Brittain, *Death of Dignity*, p. 2.

²⁹⁷ *The Star*, 20 November 1974.

year later, a memorandum from Nathaniel Davis to Kissinger on 1 May 1975 described Savimbi's background (at this stage the CIA was only supporting Roberto) and stated that 'The South Africans have expressed interest in providing financial assistance [the rest of the document remains classified]'.²⁹⁸ The original report prepared for Kissinger by the Davis task force, submitted on 13 June, asserted that 'Pretoria is concerned that a communist or otherwise unfriendly regime in Luanda might support guerrilla activity in Namibia and foster serious problems along that border. However, South Africa does not seem to be planning action to counter this threat and, in fact, gives little indication that it sees any need to formulate an Angolan policy at all'.²⁹⁹ However, by 16 July Davis reported to Kissinger that 'South Africa is reported to be giving Roberto some support'.³⁰⁰

According to the American writer James Roherty (who reconstructed the events leading up to the Angolan invasion from interviews with key South African participants), 'the rush of the East bloc to fill the Angolan vacuum' by June 1975 led Vorster to sound out the Ford administration 'as to a collaborative response'. Roherty claims this was 'an auspicious moment from the South African standpoint – the beginnings of a joint undertaking with the United States'.³⁰¹ However, he does not reveal his source for this information.³⁰² Gleijeses has claimed that even if Vorster did not consult the Americans, 'it is difficult to believe that the CIA did not approach the South Africans' as relations between BOSS and the CIA were notoriously close.³⁰³

During the hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on African Affairs, it was officially acknowledged that South Africa and the United States did regularly exchange intelligence data.³⁰⁴ In sharp contrast to stated American policy, the CIA and the National Security Agency had been collaborating with Pretoria's intelligence service since the 1960s and continued to do so in regard to Angola.³⁰⁵ According to Stockwell, BOSS maintained close contact with the CIA: 'On two occasions the BOSS director [General van den

²⁹⁸ Quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 284.

²⁹⁹ Quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 292.

³⁰⁰ Memo quoted in Davis, 'The Angola Decision of 1975', p. 116.

³⁰¹ J. Roherty, *State Security in South Africa: Civil-Military Relations Under P.W. Botha* (M.E. Sharpe, New York, 1992), pp. 37, 73.

³⁰² Roherty's book consistently supports Botha's point of view. The author's main thesis is that Botha, recognising that South Africa needed to establish a new political order encompassing all its peoples, moved effectively to prepare the ground for fundamental constitutional change using the SADF as his main tool.

³⁰³ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 291. Gleijeses concluded that 'Pretoria was part and parcel of IAFEATURE', p. 357.

³⁰⁴ Responses by Kissinger and Deputy Assistant Secretary Mulcahy to questions put by Senator Dick Clark: United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, pp. 53, 187.

³⁰⁵ *New York Times*, 16 July 1978; 23 July 1986; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 208, 218; S. Talbot, 'The CIA and BOSS: Thick as Thieves', in E. Ray, W. Schaap, K. van Meter & L. Wolf (eds), *Dirty Work 2: The CIA in Africa*.

Bergh] visited Washington and held secret meetings with Jim Potts³⁰⁶...The COS [chief of station], Pretoria, was ordered to brief BOSS about IAFEATURE, and nearly all CIA intelligence reports on the subject were relayed to Pretoria so his briefings would be accurate and up to date'.³⁰⁷ Stockwell also wrote that in October 1975, the chief of the CIA station in Kinshasa, was granted permission to meet BOSS representatives on a regular basis in Kinshasa and other CIA officers 'clamoured for permission' to visit South African bases in Namibia.³⁰⁸ P.W. Botha has stated that the BOSS-CIA link was 'not the only channel' used for coordination.³⁰⁹ Spies' official history claims that '*at the beginning*, there were no direct contacts between the two governments at the usual Foreign Ministry and ambassadorial levels'.³¹⁰ Indeed it appears that Kissinger only saw Pik Botha, the South African ambassador once during the crisis.³¹¹ However, it has been claimed that, between July and December 1975, Brand Fourie, the South Africa Secretary for Foreign Affairs, made more than twenty clandestine visits to Zambia to liaise with Kaunda and Jean Wilkowski, the American ambassador to Lusaka.³¹²

Stockwell categorically stated: 'We entered into joint activities with South Africa'.³¹³ With regards to CIA operatives on the ground in Angola, Stockwell claimed that CIA paramilitary officers were training UNITA troops in Silva Porto and the FNLA in Ambriz.³¹⁴ According to Du Preez when the South African military instructors arrived to train UNITA troops near Silva Porto, the CIA was already training recruits there 'And in the following weeks the South Africans and Americans worked side by side – each under his own cover'. At their training camp the radio-transmitters of UNITA, the SADF and the CIA were located in three adjoining rooms.³¹⁵ Stockwell claimed: 'Especially in the field, CIA officers liked the South Africans, who tended to be bluff, aggressive men without guile. They admired South African efficiency'.³¹⁶ The journalist Fred Bridgland described an encounter at Silva Porto with the CIA's liaison officer with Savimbi who was, at the time, accompanied by Commandant 'Kaas' van der Waals, the SADF liaison officer in charge of instructors training Savimbi's troops.³¹⁷ When Roberto launched his ill-fated attack on Luanda on the eve

³⁰⁶ Potts was the head of the CIA's Africa Division and chaired the interagency task group that oversaw IAFEature.

³⁰⁷ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 187.

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 187.

³⁰⁹ Klinghoffer, *The Angolan War*, p. 45.

³¹⁰ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 260. The italics are mine.

³¹¹ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 80.

³¹² Bridgland, 'The Future of Angola', p. 33.

³¹³ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 10.

³¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 90, 176-77.

³¹⁵ Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 45, 48.

³¹⁶ Stockwell claimed that the CIA had traditionally sympathized with South Africa; the two organizations shared a violent antipathy toward communism and in the early 1960s the South Africans had facilitated the CIA's recruitment of mercenaries to suppress the Congo rebellion: Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 187-188. On the cordial relations between BOSS and the CIA see: Talbot, 'The CIA and BOSS: Thick as Thieves'.

³¹⁷ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, pp. 6-7.

of independence he was accompanied by twenty-six South Africans operating heavy guns.³¹⁸ From a ridge, CIA and South African advisors together watched Roberto's advance across the Quifangondo valley.³¹⁹

Stockwell claimed that 'To the CIA, the South Africans were the ideal solution for central Angola'.³²⁰ According to the BOSS defector Gordon Winter, the CIA used South Africa as its main base for ferrying arms and ammunition to UNITA and the South African Air Force airlifted these supplies to UNITA via Namibia. He claimed the airlift was organised by William Rourke 'Big Bill' Jordan, head of the CIA's special operations in South Africa, and a personal friend of General van den Bergh.³²¹ However, Winter is far from a reliable source.³²² According to Stockwell, the CIA wanted to ship arms directly to South Africa and/or Namibia, which would then be transported into Angola. However, the sale or delivery of arms to South Africa by the United States was prohibited and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Edward Mulcahy, threatened to resign. After that the CIA stopped trying to expand their cooperation with South Africa 'at the policy level', but CIA case officers continued to coordinate with the South Africans in Angola, Pretoria and Kinshasa.³²³ Stockwell wrote that during November and December '[e]very CIA station involved in the conflict urged official cooperation with the South Africans and devised joint operations which would tempt headquarters into escalating CIA involvement with them. The Kinshasa station, especially, promoted joint South African activities, and its officers flew to South Africa to discuss the possibilities. The Kinshasa station urgently recommended that a US Air Force C-141 be provided to fly six additional twenty-five-pounder cannon with crews from South Africa to Kinshasa for use in northern Angola, stating that it was "very much in favour of retaining to the fullest extent possible South African involvement"'. Although the request was turned down, 'Undaunted, Kinshasa relayed urgent South African requests for fuel, for more sophisticated weapons, air support and trucks'.³²⁴

The South Africans and Americans cooperated in the distribution of American military aid that arrived through Zaire. Stockwell described how on 20 October, two South African C-130 airplanes arrived in Zaire to meet a CIA flight. CIA officers and BOSS representatives met the planes and, under the cover of darkness, jointly supervised the transloading. The South Africans then flew the shipment of arms down to Silva Porto.³²⁵ General Viljoen has corroborated this: 'Contact with the CIA was always through BOSS.

³¹⁸ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 133-135.

³¹⁹ Stockwell recounted that anticipating their imminent victory, the CIA's Angolan task force celebrated at CIA headquarters with a late-afternoon cheese and wine party: Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 213-214.

³²⁰ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 187.

³²¹ Winter also claimed that America sold Pretoria six Lockheed Hercules transport planes at the 'bargain price' of £25 million in order to assist the operation: Winter, *Inside BOSS*, pp. 544-545, 552.

³²² Winter had been a petty thief in Britain and an arms-smuggler in Tangier, before settling in Johannesburg as a journalist with the *Sunday Express*. Recruited by South African intelligence in 1963 he worked for them until he defected from BOSS in 1979.

³²³ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 189-190.

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 218.

³²⁵ Ibid, p. 187.

Our Defence Force was never directly involved with the CIA, except in cases when I was personally present, when American C-5A and C-141 aircraft were unloaded at the Kinshasa airbase at night. We usually had our own C-130 aircraft there. After the big aircraft discharged their cargo we delivered the weapons to bases in Angola.³²⁶ In a similar vein, Botha told the South African Parliament in 1978: 'We are being condemned because we were in Angola on a limited scale, but there was a time when American aircraft offloaded arms at military bases and positions in Angola which were held by South African troops. I was there myself and I saw those arms being offloaded.'³²⁷

Although exactly how it developed remains murky, it is clear that there was a certain level of collaboration between South Africa and the United States, which included joint training operations and cooperative airlifts. Furthermore, both countries launched their covert operations at roughly the same time; in August 1975 stepped-up American assistance to the FNLA began arriving through Zaire and Pretoria ordered elements of the SADF into Angola. Stockwell claimed: 'I saw no evidence that the United States formally encouraged them [the South Africans] to join the conflict'.³²⁸ However, he also wrote that the South Africans 'came into the conflict cautiously at first, watching the expanding U.S. program and timing their steps to the CIA's'³²⁹ and that 'without any memos being written at CIA headquarters saying "Let's coordinate with the South Africans", coordination was effected at all CIA levels and the South Africans escalated their involvement in step with our own'. He commented that 'Escalation was a game the CIA and South Africa played very well together'.³³⁰ Chester Crocker, who became Ronald Reagan's Assistant Secretary for African Affairs and had access to the classified record, wrote that through the late spring of 1975 'an intense debate over Angolan developments had been underway within the South African government. Pretoria was in close contact with all the Western and African players, and was actively courted by FNLA and UNITA leaders as well as certain African governments to throw its weight into the balance...Pretoria began providing clandestine aid to the FNLA and UNITA. Zairean army units had started to deploy across the border into northern Angola in support of the FNLA. Washington, of course, was well aware of these moves: our winks and nods formed part of the calculus of Angola's neighbours'. Furthermore, Crocker claimed that: 'The United States and other Western governments had done nothing to discourage Pretoria's mid-October intervention'.³³¹

It is impossible to say whether South Africa ever got a secret nod from the United States; but South Africa's leaders insisted they had got the message correctly. Vorster expected, if not direct military involvement by Washington, then at least strong support for South Africa's own intervention. Vorster and his advisers critically misjudged the mood of America. Fallout from the Watergate scandal still hung heavy

³²⁶ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 24.

³²⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 17 April 1978, cols. 4947-4948.

³²⁸ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 186.

³²⁹ Ibid, p. 185.

³³⁰ Ibid, p. 188.

in the air and neither the American public nor Congress, chastened and disillusioned by a lost war in Vietnam, would tolerate direct intervention in another obscure, distant conflict.³³² Furthermore, 1975 was to be the 'Year of Intelligence' during which the Senate Intelligence (Church) Committee and the corresponding House (Pike) Committee put the American intelligence community under unprecedented scrutiny. By July 1975, the Church Committee was likening the CIA to a rogue elephant on the rampage.³³³

The role of other Western governments in the Angolan conflict is harder to pinpoint than that of the United States. On 28 November, *The Star* quoted an anonymous source in Pretoria as saying that South Africa was 'in good company because we find ourselves in the company of the big free nations of the world', which the newspaper interpreted as France, Britain, the US and possibly Belgium.³³⁴ Moss claimed: 'Agents from most Western Powers bobbed up in Silva Porto throughout the [South African] campaign', and 'Before the end of the conflict, most Western nations - America, Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, Spain and Israel - had contributed their might to the anti-Soviet forces in Angola'. But he gave few details of what this contribution entailed.³³⁵ It does appear, however, that both France and Britain covertly assisted UNITA and the FNLA to a limited degree. Crocker asserted that by July 1975, the British and French governments had begun 'their own clandestine assistance programs'.³³⁶

Moss alleged that: 'British Intelligence and private interests – especially Tanganyika Concessions and Lonrho, which loaned UNITA its pilots – remained in close liaison with UNITA and arranged delivery of smaller items such as radio equipment. UNITA leaders frequently came to London for medical treatment and to lobby British MPs'.³³⁷ However, Botha's official biography claimed that Edward Heath, the leader of the British Conservative Party, 'fairly apologetically tried to explain to Carel de Wet, South Africa's ambassador, on 19 February 1976, when South Africa was almost out of Angola, that British interests in Africa (i.e. Nigeria's oil) made it impossible for him to get involved in Angola'.³³⁸ Two separate sources documented assistance given to UNITA by the British multinational, Lonrho. When Stockwell flew from Lusaka to meet Savimbi in Silva Porto in August 1975, he did so aboard a small Lear jet with a British crew on loan from Lonrho. Stockwell remarked that Lonrho was betting on Savimbi winning the war, and hoped he'd reward them with preferential access to Angola's minerals.³³⁹ Similarly, Fred Bridgland

³³¹ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, p. 49.

³³² R. Price, *U.S. Foreign Policy in Sub-Saharan Africa: National Interest and Global Strategy* (Institute of International Studies, University of California, Berkeley, Calif., 1978), p. 37.

³³³ Andrew, *For the President's Eyes Only*, p. 411.

³³⁴ *The Star*, 28 November 1975.

³³⁵ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977.

³³⁶ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, p. 48.

³³⁷ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 6 February 1977. For a speculative and largely unsubstantiated account of Britain's involvement in Angola see: P. Hutton & J. Bloch, 'What Britain Did in Angola', in E. Ray, W. Schaap, K. van Meter, L. Wolf (eds), *Dirty Work 2: The CIA in Africa*.

³³⁸ De Villiers, *PW*, p. 246.

³³⁹ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 139.

described travelling on the Hawker-Siddeley 125 executive jet which, together with British pilots, had been put at Savimbi's disposal by Lonrho.³⁴⁰

During the war Vorster told Sir De Villiers Graaff, the leader of the Opposition in South Africa, that South Africa had the support of the French government.³⁴¹ On 24 December, the *Washington Post* reported that the French *Service de Documentation Exterieur et Contre-Espionage* (SDECE) was channelling money and arms to the FNLA, in cooperation with the CIA and with the approval of President Giscard d'Estaing.³⁴² In his memoirs Kissinger described a meeting with d'Estaing in Paris on 16 December 1975, at which the French President agreed to provide auxiliary (French African or Moroccan) troops, Alouette helicopters and Mirage fighters, and to help the United States gain diplomatic support for the FNLA and UNITA from French-speaking countries.³⁴³ Stockwell claimed that 'The Pretoria and Paris stations were euphoric, having greater access to BOSS and SDECE representatives than ever in agency history, but the intelligence exchange was entirely one-sided. The South Africans and French accepted voluminous intelligence reports and detailed briefings from those CIA stations but never reciprocated with much information about what they were doing in Angola'.³⁴⁴ However, he does state that the French cooperated in supplying arms for UNITA and the FNLA and in recruiting mercenaries to assist them. The French contributed four Alouette missile-firing helicopters, which the Americans delivered to Kinshasa in early January 1976. The CIA intended to deliver them directly to the South Africans (despite America's policy against military collaboration), but South Africa withdrew from Angola before pilots could be found.³⁴⁵ Moss referred to two ships used to transport Cuban troops and arms into Angola from Congo being blown up 'by Portuguese agents in contact with the French intelligence service'.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, he claimed that when the South Africans eventually withdrew their instructors from Silva Porto, French mercenaries working for SDECE took over. Moss concluded that in Angola 'in many ways, the French were more adventurous than any other Western power'.³⁴⁷

Both Spies and Du Preez also attributed a key role to the French. According to Du Preez, Vorster had claimed in 1980 that South African involvement in Angola 'was a military adventure but the moment the French and Americans ran away, had we stayed then, it would have been a full-scale war for our side'.³⁴⁸ Spies wrote that Paris helped the FNLA and UNITA and after the SADF conquered Lobito on 7 November, the American and French governments pressed the South Africans to keep going: 'Both asked South Africa

³⁴⁰ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, pp. 6-7.

³⁴¹ Graaff, *Div Looks Back*, p. 242.

³⁴² E. Harsch & T. Thomas, *Angola: The Hidden History of Washington's War* (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1976), p. 108.

³⁴³ Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, pp. 822-824.

³⁴⁴ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 181.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

³⁴⁶ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 30 January 1977.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6 February 1977.

³⁴⁸ Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. 234.

to “chalk up a success against Luanda”.³⁴⁹ Botha’s official biography described French arms shipments: ‘France was not prepared to openly get involved and French aid remained small. At the start of November nine cargo airplanes of French weapons were offloaded in Kinshasa. At the end of November four gunship helicopters with equipment arrived without crew. When they decided to supply anti-tank missiles they were handed to the CIA at Istres in France to ensure that they could not be traced back to them’.³⁵⁰ A later official biography of Botha attributed a key role to the French in encouraging South African intervention: ‘With the knowledge and support of certain Western countries, like the USA and France, the South African government soon approved its military involvement in Angola as support for Dr Savimbi’.³⁵¹

R.W. Johnson was the first independent writer to speculate at any length about France’s role in Angola. He proposed that France’s continued supply of armaments to South Africa, despite international opposition, was such a diplomatic risk that it must have had ‘a considerable pay-back’. He stressed that at the time France was trying to diversify the sources of its oil and reduce its dependence on the Arab-bloc. The French were well-established in Zaire and had strong links with Mobutu. Johnson claimed that French policy-makers saw in the Angolan civil war a chance to extend their influence into the neighbouring oil-rich enclave of Cabinda. Therefore, France promoted the civil war in Angola in order to be able to promote Cabindan separatism through the Front for the Liberation of the Enclave of Cabinda (FLEC).³⁵² Despite having no firm evidence, Johnson claimed that the elements of a deal between Pretoria and Paris ‘stare one rudely in the face’ and that for French arms ‘Pretoria might well have been willing to pay in blood’.³⁵³ Although Johnson’s account read somewhat like a conspiracy theory it may contain an element of truth. France was indeed South Africa’s main supplier of arms and had played a key intermediary role in détente with some of the Francophone states. On 8 November 1975 Zairean troops and FLEC, assisted by French mercenaries, launched an attack against the MPLA and Cuban forces in Cabinda.³⁵⁴ According to Stockwell, these mercenaries may have been hired by the French intelligence service (SDECE).³⁵⁵ Two months previous, Neto had told *Le Monde*, ‘It appears that it is France’s destiny to help the reactionary forces in Africa’.³⁵⁶

In June 1976, amidst a media frenzy, three American and ten British mercenaries were tried before the People’s Revolutionary Tribunal in Luanda for ‘war crimes against the Angola people’.³⁵⁷ Four were

³⁴⁹ Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 55.

³⁵⁰ De Villiers, *PW*, p. 246.

³⁵¹ Prinsloo, *Stem uit die Wilderness*, p. 65.

³⁵² Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, pp. 40-42, 116-119.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 40, 118.

³⁵⁴ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 312.

³⁵⁵ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 164.

³⁵⁶ *Le Monde*, 20 September 1975.

³⁵⁷ I am grateful to John Nammock, one of the ten British mercenaries tried in Luanda, for his comments on this section, which he agreed was an accurate description of events.

executed by firing squad on 10 July 1976.³⁵⁸ The remaining nine were given prison sentences of up to 30 years (though all were released within eight).³⁵⁹ The Cubans and Soviets made much propaganda of the trial during which it was claimed that American and British intelligence services had played a role in recruiting the mercenaries.³⁶⁰

On 29 January 1976, Kissinger told the Senate Hearings on Angola that the CIA was not involved in the recruitment of mercenaries for Angola. However, he conceded that in an indirect way, money given to UNITA might have then been used by UNITA to recruit mercenaries.³⁶¹ In his memoirs Kissinger glossed over the issue of the mercenaries³⁶², but Stockwell gave a more detailed account of the CIA's hiring of 'foreign military advisers'.³⁶³ According to Stockwell, the CIA made contact with Bob Denard, a veteran mercenary of the Congo and later of Benin and Grand Comoro, through the French intelligence service. For \$500,000 Denard agreed to provide twenty French mercenaries to 'advise' UNITA.³⁶⁴ Denard has confirmed that the CIA gave him money to raise mercenaries for UNITA and by January 1976 he had just over twenty in Angola.³⁶⁵ Stockwell claimed that the CIA also recruited Portuguese mercenaries for the FNLA, but they only arrived in Kinshasa once the fighting in the north of Angola was virtually over.³⁶⁶ Several American press reports at the time claimed that hundreds of Americans were fighting in Angola. In January 1976 *The Christian Science Monitor* reported that the CIA had shipped 300 mercenaries to South Africa and was awaiting funds to send a second group, including men on 'indefinite leave' from the Green Berets.³⁶⁷ In fact only six American citizens made it to Angola as mercenaries.³⁶⁸ George Bacon III was

³⁵⁸ Bridgland, 'Angola and the West', p. 133. These were three Britons: Costas Georgiou, Andy Mackenzie and 'Brummie' Barker and an American, Daniel Gearhart: Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 225.

³⁵⁹ Brittain, *Death of Dignity*, p. 4; T. Ripley, *Mercenaries: Soldiers of Fortune* (Parragon, Bristol, 1997), p. 30.

³⁶⁰ A. Poltorak, 'Mercenarism on Trial', (*International Affairs*, Moscow, No. 10, 1976), p. 102. For an account of the Luanda trial from a pro-MPLA perspective see: W. Burchett & D. Roebuck, *The Whores of War: Mercenaries Today* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1977).

³⁶¹ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 27.

³⁶² Kissinger, *Years of Renewal*, p. 813.

³⁶³ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 182-185, 216-226, 233-234, 244-248, 259.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 184.

³⁶⁵ *Washington Post*, 14 February 1976. Two of the 22 French mercenaries were killed in action, the rest withdrew in mid-March 1976: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 343.

³⁶⁶ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 217, 222-223, 244-245.

³⁶⁷ The claim was reported in the *Financial Times*, 2 January 1976. *New York Times*, 16 July 1978, claimed the CIA had spent over a million dollars on its Angolan mercenary programme.

³⁶⁸ See: C. Dempster, D. Tomkins and M. Parry, *Fire Power* (St Martin's Press, New York, 1980), pp. 388-394; G. Acker, 'Angolan Reflections: A Mercenary's Road to Hell', (*Soldier of Fortune*, February 1986); A.J. Venter, 'War in Angola: Mercs in Action', (*Soldier of Fortune*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1976); R. Brown, 'Murder in Luanda', (*Soldier of Fortune*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1976).

killed in action³⁶⁹ and three Americans, Gary Acker, Daniel Francis Gearhart and Gustave Grillo, were amongst those tried in Luanda. Gearhart was executed.³⁷⁰

It was, in fact, Britain that became the main recruiting centre for mercenaries for Angola (through a company called Security Advisory Service run by John Banks, a former British paratrooper).³⁷¹ Stockwell claimed that the CIA was not involved in the recruitment of these mercenaries.³⁷² In the latter half of January 1976, about 140 mercenaries left England for Angola via Zaire. Another 60 followed in early February. Scotland Yard drew up a list of over 200 British mercenaries fighting for the FNLA.³⁷³ By the time the British mercenaries arrived in northern Angola the FNLA was crumbling and their escapades ended as a bloody farce. Their commander Costas Georgiou, a former British paratrooper known by the *nom de guerre* Colonel Tony Callan, executed fourteen British mercenaries serving under him. Callan himself was later tried and executed by the MPLA. When the MPLA began a major offensive against the FNLA's positions in the north, the remaining British mercenaries retreated to Zaire.³⁷⁴

During an Old Bailey trial in March 1977, John Banks alleged that the British Secret Service (which he claimed to have worked for) had been closely involved in sending Callan and other British mercenaries to Angola. He claimed they were tasked to recover a stash of diamonds which had been looted from a large mine in Angola. In reporting this Winter claimed that, under torture by the MPLA, Callan had confessed the location of the diamonds, which were then delivered to Moscow. Winter alleged that British intelligence had been in league with BOSS in the recruitment of the British mercenaries. He claimed that 'an inspector of the British Special Branch named Tucker' had helped Banks get his mercenaries through British immigration control, and that Banks had been accompanied to Angola by a senior British intelligence man who later died there.³⁷⁵ Intriguing as Winter's account may be, it must be treated with some caution. However, the part played by the British government is far from clear. Although the British foreign secretary, James Callaghan, publicly deplored the recruitment of mercenaries, many of the mercenaries did indeed leave Britain without passing through passport or immigration controls.³⁷⁶ Two of the British mercenaries, Chris Dempster and Dave Tomkins, later confirmed that the Immigration Office allowed them to travel without passports.³⁷⁷ A memorandum sent from the American embassy in London to

³⁶⁹ R. Brown & R. Himber, 'The Story of George Bacon: A Twentieth Century Crusader', (*Soldier of Fortune*, Fall 1976), pp. 13-18, 76-77; Ripley, *Mercenaries*, p. 30.

³⁷⁰ P. Colligan, *Soweto Remembered: Conversations with Freedom Fighters* (World View Publishers, New York, 1981), p. 110. Gearhart's widow later unsuccessfully sued the CIA: Poltorak, 'Mercenarism on Trial', p. 97.

³⁷¹ Ripley, *Mercenaries*, p. 29.

³⁷² Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 223-224.

³⁷³ *Daily Telegraph*, 3 April 1976 quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 488 fn.39.

³⁷⁴ Ripley, *Mercenaries*, p. 30.

³⁷⁵ Winter, *Inside BOSS*, pp. 533-537.

³⁷⁶ *Daily Telegraph*, 13 February 1976.

³⁷⁷ Dempster, Tomkins & Parry, *Fire Power*, p. 107. They also claimed that in transit the mercenaries had been allowed to stay overnight in Brussels without the proper documentation. According to some press

Kissinger, in March 1976, stated: 'Britain's direct involvement in Angola was little and unhappy. And its last involvement – the haphazard introduction of largely British mercenaries to rescue the FNLA – ended in squalid tragedy'.³⁷⁸

From Pretoria's point of view the prospect of a joint, or at least tacitly joint, covert campaign with the West was a tempting prospect. South African leaders had long nurtured hopes that their country would be accepted by the Western powers as a southern arm of NATO, or at least that some sort of military alliance, committing the West to the defence of South Africa, would be established.³⁷⁹ The changing regional situation spurred Pretoria into a more energetic pursuit of closer ties with NATO and individual Western powers. Within a month of the Lisbon coup top cabinet officials were in Europe and the United States seeking assurances of Western support.³⁸⁰ However, by the 1970s, South Africa was growing increasingly isolated. The evolving geo-strategies of the United States no longer gave priority to control of the Cape sea route and, in June 1975, the new British Labour government had cancelled the Simonstown Agreement, leaving South Africa without any formal security links.³⁸¹ A cooperative military effort with the West could both demonstrate South Africa's strategic value and potentially serve as a catalyst for the long-sought-after formal alliance. Stockwell believed that 'The South Africans hoped to gain sympathy from the West by supporting the same side as the Zairians, Zambians and United States in the Angolan conflict... South

reports, Belgium gave covert aid, including arms to the FNLA. See: *The Times*, 9 November 1975; *Washington Post*, 6 January 1976.

³⁷⁸ Memorandum from American embassy in London to the US Secretary of State, 2 March 1976 quoted in Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 337.

³⁷⁹ D. Prinsloo, *United States Foreign Policy and the Republic of South Africa* (Foreign Affairs Association, Pretoria, 1978), pp. 58-59.

³⁸⁰ Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, p. 25.

³⁸¹ Adam, 'Ideologies of Dedication', p. 39. The Agreement of 1955 was not an alliance but a naval pact that did not formally bind the British government to support of South Africa: D. Lowin, *Causes and Aspects of the Growth of the South African Defence Force and the Military Industrial Complex, 1960 to 1977* (MA Thesis, University of York Centre for Southern African Studies, September 1977), p. 5. After the British termination Pretoria offered the Simonstown base to both Paris and Washington: Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, p. 215.

Africa entered the war, watching the United States program closely and hoping for an overt nod of recognition and camaraderie'.³⁸² He judged that 'the South Africans were attempting to draw closer to the United States, in preparation for future confrontations with the blacks in southern Africa'.³⁸³

³⁸² Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, pp. 186-187.

³⁸³ *Ibid*, p. 188.

WHAT WERE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR SOUTH AFRICA?

INTERNATIONAL RECRIMINATIONS AND DIPLOMATIC RAMIFICATIONS

'Rightly or wrongly, Operation Savannah led to South Africa being branded an out-and-out aggressor in the Hitlerian mould'.¹

Although MPLA spokesmen had been condemning South Africa's intervention since August 1975, throughout September and October, few western journalists gave much consideration to South African activities in Angola.² Occasional references were made to 'white mercenaries', but these were usually assumed to be Portuguese. To a certain extent the international escalation of the war shielded South Africa, as the western media tended to accept the East-West context in which the United States had set the conflict.³ While most foreign journalists concentrated on the Cold War implications of Angola, only a vigilant few examined the South African presence.⁴ Furthermore, although the number of foreign correspondents in Luanda steadily increased as independence approached, communications between the capital and the south had virtually broken down and it was difficult to substantiate rumours of direct South African involvement.⁵ In general, the international media continued to downplay the MPLA's accusations, including Neto's, on 19 October, of the existence of the South African-led column moving northwards toward Luanda.⁶

However, Neto's announcement was followed by the first indication of the diplomatic fall-out from Pretoria's involvement in Angola. On 27 October, the Chinese instructors who had been training the FNLA

¹ Steenkamp, *Borderstrike!*, p. 19.

² Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 140. The first news of the 'invasion' was given by an MPLA spokesman and reported in *Le Monde*, 25 October 1975. Two days later *West Africa* carried an MPLA statement that South African military aircraft were arriving at Nova Lisboa with arms for UNITA. On 31 October, the *Financial Times*, quoting Portuguese sources, claimed the invading force contained three hundred white men, some of whom were 'English-speaking South Africans'. Portuguese military intelligence, as quoted in the *The Observer* on 2 November, claimed English-speaking officers, thought to be South Africans, were leading the column but put the date on which they crossed the border at 23 October.

³ E. Windrich, *The Cold War Guerrilla: Jonas Savimbi and the Angolan War* (Greenwood Press, New York, 1992), p. 1. The *New York Times* first revealed the existence of an American covert operation in Angola on 25 September 1975. However, the first criticism of U.S. policy did not appear in the American press until the *New York Times* of 3 November.

⁴ This could prove dangerous. During a visit to interview three Cuban prisoners held by UNITA in Silva Porto, journalists reported that 'Two white men who had not been seen before emerged with the Cubans...Journalists questioned them and they replied in French, that they were also journalists': 'French Journalists Held in UNITA Prison', *The Times*, 8 January 1976. It was later reported that 'Two French journalists are in jail for asking embarrassing questions about the South Africans': *Evening Standard*, 16 January 1976.

⁵ Interview with Wilf Nussey, Argus Africa News Service Editor. For a description of the situation in Luanda see: Kapuściński, *Another Day of Life*.

left Zaire.⁷ *The Guardian* reported that, according to officials in Beijing, 'South Africa's presence, openly admitted by Pretoria, at least in the border areas, was the main factor that led the Chinese recently to reduce their involvement. They were embarrassed at finding themselves on the same side as South Africa'.⁸ The Soviets were not slow to call Beijing's revolutionary credentials into question⁹ and as a result China withdrew its support from the FNLA and loudly proclaimed a position of neutrality regarding Angola.

In the weeks leading up to independence, as the South African Zulu column advanced up the coast toward Luanda, the composition of the column began to be more closely scrutinized. Eventually two western journalists, Fred Bridgland of Reuters and Michael Nicholson of British Independent Television News, filed eyewitness accounts of the presence of South African troops in Angola.¹⁰ Tasked with reporting the UNITA side of the conflict, Bridgland had first visited Angola in September 1975 and interviewed Savimbi.¹¹ Following reports of the military successes of the FNLA-UNITA forces, he returned to Angola to try and discover what had turned the tide in their favour. On 1 November 1975, he encountered five young white men transporting armoured cars at Silva Porto. They spoke with strong South African accents but claimed to be English mercenaries.¹² A week later Bridgland encountered another South African (who he later discovered was Commandant Kaas van der Waals, the SADF liaison officer in charge of training UNITA troops).¹³ Speaking with Nicholson on a flight to Lusaka on 9 November, Bridgland discovered that Nicholson shared his suspicion of a South African presence in Angola.¹⁴

Eager to show the world what it was accomplishing, UNITA flew a group of journalists into Lobito on 10 November. Bridgland and Nicholson, who were part of the group, befriended the British pilots of Savimbi's private jet who urged them to stay onboard whilst they flew to a refuelling site. The refuelling stop was at Rundu, a South African military base just across the border in Namibia. There the journalists saw Panhard armoured cars being loaded onto transport planes, and so discovered what Bridgland

⁶ Neto's speech on Radio Lisbon, 19 October 1975 referred to in: Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 157 fn.41.

⁷ Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 330.

⁸ *The Guardian*, 10 December 1975.

⁹ See for example, 'The Maoists, who have allied themselves with the darkest forces of international reaction', *New Times*, December 1975.

¹⁰ For their somewhat conflicting personal accounts see: M. Nicholson, *A Measure of Danger: Memoirs of a British War Correspondent* (HarperCollins, New York, 1991); Bridgland: *Jonas Savimbi and The War for Africa*.

¹¹ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, p. 6.

¹² The South African troops were instructed to use only English to limit the possibility of being positively identified as South African. If questioned they were to say they were mercenaries from any English-speaking country apart from South Africa: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 99; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. 68. They were not allowed to wear South African uniforms or to carry any form of identification, South Africa money, cameras or photos of their families (Interviews with servicemen conducted by this author).

¹³ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, p. 7.

¹⁴ Both claim to have informed the other of the South African incursion.

described as 'the pot of gold at the end of Jonas Savimbi's rainbow'.¹⁵ When they returned to Angola later that day, they spotted a group of young fair-haired white men at Benguela airport. Returning from their visit to the nearby town of Lobito, Nicholson's cameraman surreptitiously filmed a Panhard armoured car with its white crew guarding the approach road to Benguela airport.¹⁶ At a press conference in Lobito on 13 November they challenged Savimbi over whether South African troops were the secret of UNITA's recent successes. Savimbi's reply was ambiguous: 'There are no South African troops committed by the South African government here... I agree that we have some white troops – not soldiers, but technicians – working for us here, doing things that we don't know how to do. I need people to fight with armoured cars that we cannot operate ourselves.' Savimbi then drew a comparison: 'If you are a drowning man in a crocodile-filled river and you've just gone under for the third time, you don't question who is pulling you to the bank until you're safely on it.'¹⁷

Bridgland and Nicholson filed their reports simultaneously on 14 November, in keeping with their agreement to release their scoop at the same time. Bridgland's report for Reuters, 'Angola-South Africans', was released the following day.¹⁸ Nicholson gave an eyewitness description of the South African troops and showed photographs of their armoured cars travelling through southern Angola. *The Guardian* quoted Nicholson saying that South African regular troops were spearheading the advance on Luanda, but the paper failed to stress the importance of his information and continued to describe the invaders as a 'mercenary-supported FNLA-UNITA column'.¹⁹ Although both journalists had achieved the exposé of the Angolan war, the immediate impact was not that great. Nicholson's snatched film was not particularly convincing as it only showed 11 seconds of white faces.²⁰ The original story Bridgland had filed was that South African regular troops, not mercenaries, were leading the advance on Luanda. However, Reuters, erring on the side of caution, refused to state categorically that South Africa had invaded Angola. Instead the published report referred to 'white soldiers'.²¹ On 16 November *The Observer* published an article by Tony Hodges, who had been in Benguela with Bridgland and Nicholson. The article was titled, 'South African Troops Join Angola Civil War'. Hodges described how in Benguela he had seen 'fifty uniformed South African troops', and 'sandy-haired South African soldiers...aged between 18 and 20, too young to be mercenaries'. However, his report was not put on the front page and *The Observer* did not follow up its claims. Eventually, on 21 November, Reuters ran a more assertive report stating that South African regular

¹⁵ Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, pp. 138-139; Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁶ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, p. 9.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 10-11; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 142.

¹⁸ Versions of it were published in *The Times*, 15 November, *Los Angeles Times*, 16 November and *Chicago Tribune*, 17 November. When the South African media were forbidden to quote from these reports, editorials in most opposition newspapers demanded that the government tell the nation what was happening. For examples see: *The Star*, 14 November 1975; *Cape Times*, 17 November 1975; *Rand Daily Mail*, 20 November 1975.

¹⁹ *The Guardian*, 14 November 1975.

²⁰ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 143.

²¹ Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 142.

troops were fighting hundreds of miles inside Angola.²² Bridgland claimed that his reworked story had made the front page of the *Washington Post* and, none too modestly, that it changed the course of the war.²³ In fact, the *Washington Post* placed it on page 18.²⁴

In the western media the broader Cold War context of the Angolan story overshadowed the fact that South Africa had entered the war. The majority of British and American correspondents and commentators accepted the version of events that blamed the South African incursion on Soviet-Cuban escalation. The American press not only underreported the fact of the South African intervention, but when it did so, it failed to do so in the same negative and emotional terms with which it reported the Cuban involvement.²⁵ Their portrayal of the conflict was often simplistic, painted in terms of 'Communism' vs. 'Anti-Communism'. Coverage did become more moderate, however, as knowledge of the CIA's involvement gradually emerged.²⁶ Attempts to understand the motivation behind the South African incursion were mainly confined to the British media, although these interpretations were normally influenced by the belief that the South African action was reactive rather than proactive.²⁷ In a study of the representation of South Africa in the international media, James Saunders claimed that: 'The coverage of the Angolan war represents one of the lowest points in British journalism's treatment of African news. Only the *Financial Times* sustained a consistent level of balance in its coverage and ... even this was problematic'.²⁸ British newspapers failed to adjust their position following the news of the South African invasion. This facilitated a shift to the right by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* and their support for South Africa, disguised as attacks on the weakness of the West in response to the advance of communism.

Following the first overseas press allegations of South African intervention in mid-November, Pretoria continued to deny that it had troops in Angola. In London on 18 November 1975, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hilgard Muller, categorically stated: 'South African forces are not operating in this war.' In the face of aggressive questioning, he did concede that there were 'small numbers' of South African troops guarding the Cunene water project but denied that South Africa was supplying arms or money to UNITA.²⁹ However, Pretoria's pretence was beginning to crumble. Stockwell described Bridgland's unabridged article published in the *Washington Post* and claimed that: 'The propaganda and political war was lost in that stroke. There was nothing the Lusaka [CIA] station could invent that would be as damaging to the other side as our alliance with the hated South Africans was to our cause'.³⁰ The South African government

²² Bridgland, 'Angola-Forces', *Reuters*, 21 November 1975.

²³ Bridgland, *The War for Africa*, p. 11; Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 142.

²⁴ Bridgland, 'S. African Regulars Fight Inside Angola', *Washington Post*, 23 November 1975.

²⁵ Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 144.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

²⁹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 November 1975.

³⁰ Stockwell incorrectly referred to Bridgland as Bridgefield: Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 202. The African-American press turned decisively against the US administration's policy and the fact that 'the U.S.

launched a damage limitation exercise and Botha and top SADF officials briefed the international media in Pretoria on 27 November. In what was the first official admission of South Africa's involvement in the war, Botha stated that the South African Defence Force was providing 'advice and logistic support' for the UNITA-FNLA alliance. He denied that South Africa was taking part in the war in an active capacity.³¹ At the same time the United States' Senate was debating American involvement in Angola and Botha made a thinly-veiled appeal to the West. He told the assembled foreign journalists: 'I would like to see the Free World take a more direct interest in getting Russia out of Southern Africa. It is an absolutely arrogant attempt on the part of Russia to establish itself by sheer force in Southern Africa. And secondly it is a threat to the Cape sea route, which not only endangers South Africa's position, but endangers world trade and the oil link between the Persian Gulf and major countries.' He continued: 'If we have to fight, we will fight on our borders to the last man, but South Africa is not fighting the Free World's cause to the last South African.'³²

The fact that South Africa's initial intervention in southern Angola in August had aroused little overseas interest had given Pretoria a false sense of confidence, and left it unprepared for the diplomatic furore that arose once the nature of the South African element in the 'mercenary column' had been reliably confirmed.³³ It was in Africa itself that South Africa's intervention was found most objectionable; UNITA and the FNLA had committed the unpardonable sin of joining forces with apartheid South Africa. Prior to Angolan independence President Samora Machel of Mozambique, along with the leaders of Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands and São Tomé, had joined Neto in condemning 'the imperialist aggression' of South Africa and called for recognition of the government the MPLA was preparing.³⁴ However, the OAU refused to recognise either of the two proclaimed Angolan governments. Instead it called for a cease-fire and a coalition government until free elections could be held. As South Africa's intervention became evident, however, African attitudes shifted and the OAU's policy came under increasing pressure.³⁵ There was a backlash against UNITA and the FNLA even from pro-Western and conservative African states. Not a single country had recognised the FNLA-UNITA coalition, which was now subjected to tirades like the one published in the influential *West Africa*: 'With increasing world condemnation of foreign intervention, the desperate gamble of Holden and Savimbi to snatch victory from defeat by making a devil's bargain with Pretoria has now rebounded against them. By taking aid from South Africa, UNITA and its ally have

and South Africa have climbed into the same bed' (*Pittsburgh Courier*, 27 December 1975). The seventeen members of the Congressional Black Caucus also became very vocal, after months of silence.

³¹ The South African press were permitted to report sections of the briefing a day later: *The Star*, 28 November 1975. However, the local corps of defence correspondents was not briefed until 1 December 1975: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, pp. 186-188.

³² *The Star*, 28 November 1975.

³³ Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 379.

³⁴ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, Vol. II, p. 442 fn.242.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 272.

broken the unwritten rules of Pan-Africanism, and the conjuring of the Russian bogey will not avail them much, in Africa at least'.³⁶

One of the first nations to react was Nigeria. It was an unfortunate coincidence for Pretoria that on the same day that Bridgland's story appeared in the *Washington Post*, Nigeria denounced Soviet intervention on the side of the MPLA and reiterated its support for a government of national unity in Angola.³⁷ On 27 November, outraged and embarrassed, Nigeria announced its recognition of the People's Republic of Angola.³⁸ Nigeria cited South Africa's intervention in the war as the reason for its turnabout: 'Current events in Angola must be seen in the right perspective – not just as fighting between factions in Angola but fighting between racist South Africa and its backers and the MPLA'.³⁹ In a statement explaining his country's change of heart, Colonel Garba, Nigeria's external affairs commissioner, said his government would have preferred a government of national unity in Angola, but 'the principal aim of Africa...is to liberate Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa. And any government that is installed in Angola that does not go towards helping to fulfil these ends will not really be a government that has the best interests of Africa at heart'.⁴⁰ The Nigerian press condemned what it considered to be an American-South African plot to destroy a 'sister African country',⁴¹ and demonstrators stoned the American embassy in Lagos.⁴² The Nigerian government promptly made a financial contribution of \$20 million to the MPLA.⁴³ Overnight Nigeria became an untiring champion of Neto's movement and sent envoys to neighbouring states to lobby on behalf of the MPLA. As the economic leader of black Africa and the United States' second most important source of foreign oil, Nigeria's recognition carried considerable weight in Africa and overseas.

Nigeria's recognition of the MPLA government was quickly followed by that of another African heavy-weight, Tanzania, on 5 December.⁴⁴ Tanzania's President Julius Nyerere declared that: 'South Africa wants a client state in Angola...so as to strengthen its hold on Namibia...and weaken Africa's united opposition to its internal policies of racialism and exploitation'.⁴⁵ Tanzania soon announced plans to train MPLA troops in Tanzania in a joint programme with the Soviets.⁴⁶ Further recognition followed from Ghana, Sudan and several other African states.⁴⁷ Idi Amin reversed his decision to expel the Soviets from Uganda, and when the Soviets publicly defended their Angolan programme in late December, Amin supported

³⁶ *West Africa*, 1 December 1975.

³⁷ Legum & Hodges, *After Angola*, p. 29; Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 202.

³⁸ *New York Times*, 28 November 1975.

³⁹ Nigerian statement quoted in *The Guardian*, 19 December 1975.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 276.

⁴¹ *New York Times*, 4 January 1976.

⁴² Bridgland, *Jonas Savimbi*, p. 142.

⁴³ L. Henderson, *Angola: Five Centuries of Conflict* (Cornell University Press, New York, 1979), p. 256. There were reports that Nigerian troops had been sent to assist the MPLA but these were untrue.

⁴⁴ Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 276.

⁴⁵ *The Guardian*, 13 January 1976.

⁴⁶ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 202.

⁴⁷ Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution, Vol. II*, p. 272.

them.⁴⁸ John Marcum testified before the United States Congress that published reports of the South African intervention had certainly changed the policy of Nigeria, Ghana and other states towards support of the MPLA.⁴⁹ The shifting sands of African opinion influenced the thinking of the Western European powers. At a NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Brussels in December 1975, James Callaghan, 'was plainly anxious to avoid any suggestion that any NATO member become involved in support for UNITA/FNLA'. The British position, which was supported by Canada, Norway and the Netherlands, was that 'neither Britain nor NATO can afford to be seen by Africans to be making common cause with Mr Vorster'.⁵⁰

On 16 December the MPLA displayed four captured South Africans to the press in Luanda.⁵¹ The prisoners admitted to reporters that they had been seized north of Cella, 500 miles inside Angola.⁵² Although Botha claimed that the four had gone missing whilst carrying out 'logistical duties' his reiterated claim that South African involvement was limited to protection of the Namibian border and the Cunene hydroelectric scheme was clearly a sham.⁵³ Three days later the United States/ Senate prohibited further American aid to UNITA or the FNLA and within a week Kissinger was calling for the withdrawal of all foreign forces, including South Africa.⁵⁴ On 9 January *The Guardian* quoted Senator Dick Clark as saying that 'for us to stay with South Africa will be a disaster'. Jonathan Steele, the paper's Washington correspondent, reported an awareness of 'the damage which the link with South Africa is seen to be having on black Africa' and claimed that this view 'is at least as widely held on Capitol Hill as the more commonly publicised theme that the secret American commitment in Angola could become another Vietnam'. On 29 January 1976, at the opening of the Senate hearings into the American involvement in Angola, Senator Clark stressed: 'We must also examine what this commitment [to the FNLA and UNITA] is costing us in terms of our relations with the rest of Africa. Our identification with South Africa's intervention in Angola will not help our relations with the black African states, which regard racial domination in South Africa as the most pressing problem on their continent. South Africa's intervention in the Angola conflict is regarded as an effort to assure that the government which comes to power does not challenge South Africa's illegal occupation of

⁴⁸ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 202. Amin stated: 'The main reason for Cuban and Soviet involvement was to help the Popular Movement [MPLA] drive South African forces out of Angola': *Washington Post*, 28 December 1975.

⁴⁹ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 130.

⁵⁰ *The Guardian*, 13 December 1975.

⁵¹ *Financial Times*, 17 December 1975; *Le Monde*, 18 December 1975; *Washington Post*, 18 December 1975. The four were: Sergeant Johannes Terblanche, Private Robert Wiehahn, Rifleman Robert Wilson and Private Graham Danney.

⁵² Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 289. They had been captured on 13 December near Catofe: Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. 170; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 214.

⁵³ *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 December 1975.

⁵⁴ *Cape Times*, 22 December 1975.

Namibia or its internal apartheid practices. The United States cannot afford to be associated with this effort to preserve minority rule in South Africa.⁵⁵

The end of American involvement in Angola was a heavy blow to Pretoria. A decision to withdraw was taken by Vorster and Botha in either late December or early January. Any idea of trying to displace the MPLA and Cubans from Luanda was now abandoned.⁵⁶ Botha signalled a shift in government thinking at the end of December when he made a statement to the effect that 'South Africa would almost certainly reconsider its involvement in Angola if its interests in southern Angola were guaranteed and if terrorists' attacks into South West Africa were halted'.⁵⁷ In mid-1976, Botha explained that, 'When it became clear to us that we would be left in the lurch, we decided that we would not fight to the last South African on behalf of the free world, if they themselves were not prepared to fight'.⁵⁸ A year later he claimed: 'In Angola, South Africa was prepared to take the chestnuts out of the fire on behalf of the West, but was let down at the most critical moment'.⁵⁹

However, South Africa did not withdraw from Angola immediately following the cut-off of American funds. Moss claimed that 'moderate black states' and 'senior American officials' pleaded with the South Africans to remain in Angola until the long-delayed OAU emergency summit on the Angolan crisis.⁶⁰ Initially scheduled to open on 9 December 1975, the summit eventually took place between 10-13 January 1976. The attending heads of state were torn between their discomfort with the Soviet and Cuban incursion and their loathing of South Africa. In the end the summit was deadlocked over rival proposals for the solution of the war.⁶¹ Twenty-two countries led by Nigeria's leader General Murtala Muhammed and Mozambique's Samora Machel, advocated recognition of the MPLA's People's Republic of Angola. The other twenty-two supported a resolution, sponsored by Senegal's President Senghor and supported by Kaunda and Mobutu, which condemned all foreign intervention and called for a ceasefire and then negotiations to form a tripartite 'government of national reconciliation'.⁶² The advocates of reconciliation insisted on including the phrase 'and other forces' in any condemnation of South African intervention, whilst the opposing camp refused to place the South African invasion on a par with the involvement of any other country. General Muhammed claimed that although the FNLA and UNITA had 'no doubt played

⁵⁵ United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 81.

⁵⁷ *The Times*, 30 December 1975.

⁵⁸ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 7 May 1976, col. 6299.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 21 April 1977.

⁶⁰ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977. Brand Fourie, the South African Secretary for Foreign Affairs told Fred Bridgland that on 31 December 1975 Kaunda had summoned him to Zambia, and told him that South Africa should advance all the way to Luanda: Bridgland, 'Angola and the West', p. 136.

⁶¹ Despite an American political offensive aimed at swaying the OAU against the MPLA: Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 193.

⁶² United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, Subcommittee on African Affairs, *Hearings*, p. 11; Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977. Uganda, as the country chairing the meeting, and Ethiopia, as host country, abstained from the ballot: Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 43.

their part in the liberation struggle' they had 'forfeited their right to the leadership of the Angolan people by joining hands with neo-colonialists, adventurers and racist soldiers of fortune, including the apostles of Apartheid, in a determined effort to destroy the sovereignty of Angola.'⁶³ Hoping to sway the debate, MPLA representatives displayed South African prisoners of war outside the meeting hall.⁶⁴ The summit adjourned in deadlock for the first time.⁶⁵

Although it was not formally decreed, as Moss put it, 'The only thing that the black African leaders who assembled in Addis Ababa were able to agree on was a blanket condemnation of South Africa'.⁶⁶ Even Zaire and Zambia found themselves obliged to follow a strongly anti-South African line, for fear of accusations of supporting apartheid.⁶⁷ The deadlock was in fact a victory for the MPLA. More than thirty nations had already recognised the MPLA's People's Republic of Angola based in Luanda and not a single nation had recognised the FNLA-UNITA coalition government (the Democratic Republic of Angola based in Huambo). If the OAU had passed the Senegalese resolution, some nations would possibly have recognised the Huambo government.⁶⁸ A few weeks after the OAU summit, Ethiopia and Uganda, which had abstained from the original vote, recognised the MPLA, triggering a cascade of African approvals. By February 10 the MPLA had been recognised by forty-one members of the OAU, and Neto's government became its forty-seventh member.⁶⁹ Only Zaire protested openly, calling the decision 'illegal'. Zambia did not extend formal recognition and stated: 'In our view, the MPLA victory is not really theirs. It is a Soviet-Cuban victory'.⁷⁰

It was the OAU's condemnation of South African involvement, coming on the heels of the American withdrawal of support, which ultimately forced a reassessment of policy in Pretoria. The evaporation of African and Western support made it clear that whilst certain black African countries would covertly accept South African aid, few sincerely bought its thesis of an African brotherhood which transcended racial issues, and, despite the CIA's camaraderie and whatever reassurances the South Africans felt they received

⁶³ General Muhammed condemned American efforts to get African heads of state to insist on the withdrawal of Soviet and Cuban advisers from Angola as a precondition for the withdrawal of South Africa: Speech by H.E. General Murtala Muhammed, Head of the Federal Military Government of Nigeria, at the Extraordinary Summit Conference of the OAU, concerning Angola, held in Addis Ababa on 11 January, 1976', (*Southern African Record*, No. 5, July 1976), pp. 22-23.

⁶⁴ Another three South Africans, Private Petrus Groenewald, Private Lodewyk Kitshoff and Private Andries Potgieter, had been taken prisoner since the first four in mid-December.

⁶⁵ Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, pp. 294, 296.

⁶⁶ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977. The government claimed that the split at the OAU was evidence that some countries supported South Africa's intervention. In reality both resolutions included the demand that South Africa withdraw and the judgement that South Africa should not have intervened in the first place: C. Eglin, Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 27 January 1976, col. 105.

⁶⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 8 January 1976.

⁶⁸ Henderson, *Angola: Five Centuries of Conflict*, p. 256.

⁶⁹ Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, p. 385.

from the Ford administration, the United States would not overtly support South Africa. To add insult to injury in Pretoria, France was the first Western country to officially recognise the MPLA government, on 17 February 1976.⁷¹ Although the OAU had failed to recognise the MPLA government neither had it settled on a political solution that would include UNITA and the FNLA in any future government.⁷² According to Moss: 'This was the end of the road for the South Africans. To have stayed on in Angola would have required a new injection of men and material, with no assurance of adequate backing from any major power, but with the certainty that a continued South African presence would be used by the Marxist lobby in the OAU in the bid to get a new vote that would commit the organisation to the MPLA, and in accelerated efforts to isolate South Africa within international bodies like the U.N.'.⁷³ The day after the OAU vote, Botha told the South African Cabinet that the SADF would be withdrawing from Angola. The withdrawal should begin on 17 January and be completed by 25 January.⁷⁴ On 16 January two South African generals flew into Angola and informed Roberto, Chipenda and Savimbi that South Africa would be withdrawing from Angola within a week.⁷⁵ By 22 January 1976, the SADF had pulled back to a narrow buffer zone along the Angolan/Namibian border.⁷⁶ On 3 February, Botha told the *Washington Post* that between 4,000 and 5,000 South African troops were holding the southernmost strip of Angola up to fifty miles deep stretching from the Atlantic to Zambia.⁷⁷

In February 1976 the South African government secretly funded a propaganda campaign which emphasised the threat posed by the communist presence in Angola and rebuked the West, specifically the United States, for its failure to act.⁷⁸ The title of an advertisement placed in *The Times* warned readers: 'The Free World Stands Today in Greater Danger Than At Any Time Since The Darkest Days of World War II'. South Africa's intervention in Angola was described as a 'role of honour' in the defence of the West against communism. The advertisement continued: 'In some quarters in the West it was argued that having Russia take over Angola would be preferable to being caught on the same side as racist South Africa. In the First

⁷⁰ L. Devraun, *South African Foreign Relations with Angola, 1975-1988: A Structural Realist Perspective* (MA Thesis, International Relations, Department of Political Studies, University of Cape Town, 1996), p. 78.

⁷¹ The French broke an agreement that the Common Market would act in concert. Britain, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and West Germany followed suit over the next two days, as did Sweden, Switzerland and Canada: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, p. 343. By that time over seventy nations had recognised the MPLA regime: Devraun, *South African Foreign Relations with Angola*, p. 78.

⁷² *SADF Statement*, 1977.

⁷³ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977.

⁷⁴ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 43. The Cuban build up, growing rifts between the FNLA and UNITA and the fact that the FNLA was a spent force in the north were additional factors influencing South Africa's decision.

⁷⁵ Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 300.

⁷⁶ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p. 39.

⁷⁷ *Washington Post*, 4 February 1976.

⁷⁸ The adverts were funded by the British-based Club of Ten, which claimed to be a group of South African businessmen. It was later exposed as a front organisation funded by the South African Department for Information. See: Rees & Day, *Muldergate*, pp. 32-33; De Villiers, *Secret Information*, p. 54; Winter, *Inside BOSS*, p. 491; Rhodie, *The Real Information Scandal*, p. 224.

Figure 5: An advert placed in the British press by the Club of Ten, a front organisation for the South African Department for Information.

and Second World Wars the free world heard no such arguments when South Africa (infinitely more racist than today) fought and died on our side'.⁷⁹ A similar advertisement in the *New York Times* warned that: 'The Western World is now stuck with a long-term problem – the ceaseless expansion of the biggest imperialist power the world has ever seen. The advance of the Soviets threatens our whole way of life'. Roberto was quoted as saying: 'I am strongly against apartheid, but I will say this for South Africa – when they see a neighbour's house burning they come to put out the fire.'⁸⁰

Pretoria's covert appeals to the West were to no avail. Both the British and French governments expressed concern that South Africa should completely disengage from Angola before the next meeting of the United Nations Security Council.⁸¹ It is unlikely to have been a coincidence that the last South African troops crossed the border out of Angola on 27 March, as the Security Council met to debate 'the act of aggression committed by South Africa against the People's Republic of Angola'. For years South Africa had rigidly stood by the non-intervention clause in the United Nations Charter as its main defence against foreign attempts to act against it because of apartheid. In light of Pretoria's own intervention in Angola, this defence now stood in tatters. It was claimed that South Africa's invasion of Angola was an act of aggression, and therefore further evidence that the South African regime was a threat to world peace.⁸² In a report to the United Nations, the People's Republic of Angola had estimated the damage caused by South Africa's intervention at \$6.7 billion.⁸³ In resolution 387 of 31 March 1976, the Security Council condemned South Africa's aggression against Angola and called for South Africa to pay war reparations to the Luanda government. The United States, Great Britain, France, Italy and Japan abstained from the vote. The United States urged consideration of a resolution condemning all foreign involvement in Angola⁸⁴ but also specifically criticised South Africa's involvement.⁸⁵ China claimed that the South African invasion was a result of prior Soviet intervention and refused to participate in the vote.⁸⁶ Botha was outraged: 'The action of South Africa in Angola was part of the action of the Free World, and more countries of the Free World knew about it and had no objection to it. It is not our conscience that should worry us, but the conscience of the countries that left us in the lurch in the Security Council.'⁸⁷

⁷⁹ *The Times*, 6 February 1976.

⁸⁰ *New York Times*, 9 February 1976.

⁸¹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977.

⁸² United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid's Threat to World Peace: Paper presented to the World Conference for Action Against Apartheid, Lagos, August 1977* (UN Centre Against Apartheid, Notes and Documents, Conf. 7, Lagos, November 1977), section 6.

⁸³ National Security Archive, *South Africa*, p. 52.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Barratt, *The Angolan Conflict*, p. 17.

⁸⁶ For the full text of resolution see: C. Legum (ed.), *African Contemporary Record: Annual Survey and Documents, 1976-77*, C150.

⁸⁷ Botha's speech at the Military College, Voortrekkerhoogte, 5 April 1976 quoted in J. Scholtz (ed.), *Fighter and Reformer: Extracts from the Speeches of P.W. Botha* (South African Bureau of Information, Pretoria, 1989), p. 87.

An editorial in the London *Daily Telegraph* mourned that fact that: 'The sickness that has for long afflicted the General Assembly has in this case well and truly spread its contagion to the Security Council. It can only be a matter for deep concern and regret that the three Western permanent members, Britain, the United States and France, did not have the political gumption to veto the anti-South African resolution on the grounds that it was manifestly unbalanced and unfair. They did not do so because they are terrified of being accused of being pro-South Africa, than which, apparently, there is now no more ghastly crime in the world'.⁸⁸ Similar dismay that South Africa's traditional 'allies' were not willing to defend Pretoria's involvement in Angola was echoed in the *Cape Times*. The article was entitled 'Isolated'.⁸⁹ On 1 December 1976 Angola was admitted to the United Nations.⁹⁰

Following South Africa's intervention in Angola, Vorster insisted that his policy of détente with black Africa was continuing and he spoke optimistically about its future potential.⁹¹ Hilgard Muller, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, claimed, 'our actions in Angola did not frustrate our endeavours to expand contacts with African countries. On the contrary, South Africa's involvement in Angola led to an expansion of contacts with Africa...Instead of being a setback to our détente policy in regard to Africa, our reaction to the intervention by means of force by foreign powers in a neighbouring state promoted our peace offensive, *inter alia*, because it has furnished proof of our *bona fides*'.⁹² On 7 May 1976, Botha told Parliament that one of the benefits that had accrued from South Africa's actions in Angola was that it had 'made friends in Africa who are still our friends today'.⁹³ However, Vorster's efforts to project an image of South Africa as a benign, non-interfering power in the region, and of himself as Africa's chief peacemaker, could clearly not be sustained in light on South Africa's Angolan adventure. Furthermore, events in Angola had underscored the liabilities of association with Pretoria. The leader of the Progressive Reform Party told Parliament that South Africa's involvement in Angola 'was an error of judgement and we believe that it has had a detrimental effect on relationships between South Africa and the rest of the African continent'.⁹⁴ On 27 February Zaire signed an accord with the MPLA providing for 'normalisation' of relations and in late 1976, Mobutu and Neto met in Brazzaville.⁹⁵ The Vorster-Kaunda alliance, already shaken by its failure to

⁸⁸ *Daily Telegraph*, 1 April 1976.

⁸⁹ *Cape Times*, 6 April 1976.

⁹⁰ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, p. 54. The Ford administration refused to recognise the new Angolan state and vetoed Angola's admission to the United Nations. Subsequently under President Carter, the United States continued to refuse to formally recognise the Luanda government but abstained from the United Nations vote on Angola's admission, which was then successful.

⁹¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, cols. 359-360; *Cape Times*, 2 February 1976 quoting an interview Vorster gave to SABC-TV; *Cape Times*, 15 March 1976.

⁹² Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 27 January 1976, cols. 115-116.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 7 May 1976, col. 6300.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 26 April 1976, cols. 5392-5393.

⁹⁵ Young, 'The Portuguese Coup and Zaire's Southern Africa Policy', p. 209; Minter, *Apartheid's Contras*, p. 28.

bring about a settlement in Rhodesia, was wrecked by Angola.⁹⁶ Before the end of 1976 Zambia had normalised relations with Luanda. In March 1977, Kaunda received Soviet President Nicolai Podgorny on a state visit to Lusaka. His earlier warning about the Soviet 'tiger and its cubs' seemed long-forgotten.⁹⁷

South Africa's intervention in Angola unwittingly damaged the already shaky credibility of its much-heralded 'grand apartheid' programme of separate development. The crucial test of the acceptability of Pretoria's Bantustan policy was to be the declaration of Transkeian independence on 26 October 1976.⁹⁸ The Republic of Transkei, although heavily promoted abroad, needed the backing of at least several African states if it was to stand any chance of gaining recognition from the international community. The deterioration of South Africa's relations with its previous partners in détente following Angola ensured that Transkeian independence was a fiasco. In July 1976, the OAU rejected recognition of the Transkei as an option.⁹⁹ Furthermore, within South Africa the concern was broached that, in light of events in Angola, the Transkei and other African homelands might become springboards for Soviet military aggression against South Africa.¹⁰⁰

The Angolan conflict made it clear that the Western world's relationship with southern Africa had undergone a fundamental transformation; far fewer illusions remained that the West would rush to the aid of South Africa.¹⁰¹ Angola demonstrated that the expectation that any Western nation would identify openly with Pretoria was unrealistic. The reality was that South Africa was more of a pariah state than ever. Many whites believed that South Africa's participation on the side of the West in both world wars and in Korea meant the West owed them a debt of gratitude.¹⁰² Angola demonstrated only too clearly that this was not the case. Parading South Africa as a bulwark against the expansionist communist ideology in the region would not necessarily ensure sympathy from the West. South Africa's leaders were deeply disappointed that their western and black African 'allies' had failed to give them open support in Angola. The Foreign Minister told Parliament in early March: 'Not only has the West so far done nothing or very little to halt the

⁹⁶ John Barratt placed the emphasis for the failure of détente on the Rhodesian impasse rather than Angola. However, he claimed that Angola had a negative impact on the attempt to find a solution in Rhodesia, as the black nationalists were encouraged to pursue an armed struggle rather than negotiate and the whites saw Angola as a possible scenario in Rhodesia under black-rule: Barratt, 'Southern Africa: A South African View', p. 154.

⁹⁷ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, p. 54. In July 1976, Zambia accused South Africa of having attacked the village of Sialola, killing 24 civilians and wounding another 45, and took the matter to the United Nations, as the culmination of 14 provocative acts. South Africa claimed Sialola was a SWAPO training camp.

⁹⁸ Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ Barratt, 'Southern Africa: A South African View', p. 168.

¹⁰⁰ G.E.J. Stephan & H. Booysen, 'The Angolan Conflict: Its Relevance for South Africa in her Relations with Future Independent Bantustans and the Need for a Monroe Doctrine', (*South African Yearbook of International Law* 1975, University of South Africa Vol. 1, 1976), p. 104.

¹⁰¹ A. Nagorski, 'US Options vis-à-vis South Africa', in J. Whitaker (ed.), *Africa and the United States: Vital Interests* (New York University Press, New York, 1978), pp. 187-188.

¹⁰² Arnheim, *South Africa after Vorster*, pp. 125-126.

Russian and Cuban aggression in Africa, but it is actually helping the Russians by continually sniping at South Africa, by giving support to SWAPO, by urging irresponsible action in South West Africa. This is indeed most disturbing.¹⁰³ In his New Year address Vorster lamented: 'If ... a Communist onslaught should be made against South Africa, directly or under camouflage, South Africa will have to face it alone, and certain countries which profess to be anti-Communist will even refuse to sell [us] arms.'¹⁰⁴ He claimed that the Angolan war had confirmed a lesson South Africa had previously learned: 'when it comes to the worst, South Africa stands alone.'¹⁰⁵ On 1 May *Die Burger*, the mouthpiece of the National Party in the Cape of which Botha was the leader, published a long article expressing anti-American sentiment and condemning the United States' betrayal of South Africa. Botha carried his suspicion and distrust of the West, and the United States, in particular, into his own administration. To this day, Botha remains bitter and disinclined to talk about the United States 'duplicity'.¹⁰⁶

Since the late 1960s some Nationalist voices had suggested that South Africa should assume non-committed status rather than allying itself with the West. This idea was reiterated amid the recriminations in the wake of Angola.¹⁰⁷ Although Pretoria renewed demands for the formation of a 'South Atlantic Treaty Organisation', claiming wildly that the Soviets would soon construct a naval base at Lobito¹⁰⁸, Angola seemed finally to end any determined South African efforts to find a role in the Western defence system.¹⁰⁹ Pretoria initiated a new diplomatic move that illustrated her disenchantment with Washington and a search for new allies. On 9-12 April 1976, Vorster and his Foreign Minister, Hilgard Muller, visited Israel. The outcome was an agreement to form a joint committee to foster scientific, industrial and commercial cooperation.¹¹⁰ Vorster hoped that cooperation between Israel and South Africa would be 'an example which can be emulated by other middle-rank powers'.¹¹¹

Official announcements began to claim a more neutral role in international affairs. In his New Year's speech to welcome in 1977, Botha suggested: 'Perhaps we have tried too hard to assure the West of our support. Perhaps we should consider not letting our availability be taken for granted quite so much.'¹¹² Whilst explaining to Parliament the reason for the withdrawal from Angola, Botha said: 'I have on various occasions stated that South Africa is not prepared to fight on behalf of the free world alone. Furthermore,

¹⁰³ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 5 March 1976, col. 2604.

¹⁰⁴ Nagorski, 'US Options vis-à-vis South Africa', p. 188.

¹⁰⁵ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 375.

¹⁰⁶ Telephone interview with P.W. Botha.

¹⁰⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 13 June 1977, cols. 9963-9964.

¹⁰⁸ Admiral Biermann, head of the SADF, visited Washington immediately after Pretoria's withdrawal and held a special meeting with 17 US admirals and a number of Congressmen: Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, p. 220.

¹⁰⁹ A. Seegers, 'Apartheid's Military: Its Origins and Development', in W. James (ed.), *The State of Apartheid* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, Colo., 1987), p. 153.

¹¹⁰ Warren, *United States - South African Foreign Relations*, p. 56.

¹¹¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 22 April 1976, cols. 5200-5202.

South Africa will defend with determination its own borders and those interests and borders we are responsible for.' He claimed that 'The whole history of Angola may yet come to be known as the great lost opportunity of the free world.'¹¹³ A year later Botha was still threatening: 'It must not be taken for granted that South Africa will take part in a war on the side of the West. If it suits us, we can remain neutral.'¹¹⁴ By 1978 Botha was more strident: 'South Africa will never fight for the West on its battlefields again. South Africa will in future be neutral. For as long as I am Minister of Defence, I will not allow the sons of South Africa to die for a West who has rejected South Africa and completely abandoned her.'¹¹⁵

However, Vorster's subsequent actions were not consistent with a defiant 'go it alone' posture. Despite his disenchantment with the United States, Vorster agreed to cooperate with a new American-led peace initiative in southern Africa. The African endorsement of the Soviet- and Cuban-backed MPLA led to a broad review of Africa policy within the Ford administration. According to Chester Crocker, Angola brought Africa into the mainstream of global politics.¹¹⁶ Washington would no longer be content to allow its European allies to mediate developments in Africa without American involvement.¹¹⁷ In contrast to its previously blandly acquiescent stance, the United States was determined to play an active and direct role in southern Africa to define change in the region. Personally, Kissinger was also keen to regain some of the ground he had lost in Angola by bringing peace to Namibia and Rhodesia. It was election year and Ford and Ronald Reagan, his challenger for the Republican nomination, were wrangling over Kissinger's policies, with Reagan accusing Ford of 'losing' Angola and of selling out the Rhodesians.¹¹⁸

Convinced that southern Africa had become an important piece in the geopolitical game and spurred by the possibility that war there would provide an opportunity for Cuban/Soviet involvement, Kissinger launched a version of his 'shuttle diplomacy' in an attempt to address the problems of the region. Fears of 'another Angola' meant there was a new sense of urgency about the need to solve the outstanding colonial problems of Rhodesia and Namibia.¹¹⁹ Kissinger made his first official visit to Africa in April 1976. He did not stress the horrors of Soviet intervention or try to recast the region's conflicts as a clash between ideological spheres, as both he and Vorster had done with regard to Angola. Instead Kissinger promised a thorough revision of American policy toward southern Africa. He announced his willingness to work with African

¹¹² Botha's New Year Message, 31 December 1976 quoted in J. Scholtz (ed.), *Fighter and Reformer*, p. 72.

¹¹³ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 58.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in *The Times*, 28 January 1977.

¹¹⁵ Botha's speech to a National Party meeting in Piketberg, 4 March 1978 quoted in J. Scholtz (ed.), *Fighter and Reformer*, p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Crocker, *High Noon in Southern Africa*, p. 51. Following the Angolan war South Africa was subjected to a degree of international media coverage not hitherto experienced in its history. The number of foreign correspondents and 'stringers' in South Africa increased rapidly, in contrast to many other areas of the world: Sanders, *South Africa and the International Media*, p. 4.

¹¹⁷ Wright, *US Policy Toward Angola*, pp. 3-4.

¹¹⁸ Ford, *A Time to Heal*, p. 388.

¹¹⁹ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. vii.

leaders to achieve negotiated settlements in Rhodesia and Namibia.¹²⁰ His Lusaka speech of 26 April 1976, firmly committed, for the first time, the United States to majority rule in Rhodesia and Namibia, and to the ending of 'institutionalised separation of races' in South Africa.¹²¹ The dismay felt in Pretoria when the United States had disassociated itself from South Africa's Angolan adventure now approached something like disgust.¹²²

Nevertheless, Vorster had three rounds of talks with Kissinger, between June and September 1976¹²³, the result of which was the abortive Geneva Conference of October-November 1976. The talks were something of a diplomatic breakthrough for Pretoria. Not since Smuts had conferred with Truman thirty years before had there been such a high-level meeting between South Africa and the United States. Pretoria claimed it signified an upgrading of South Africa on the American priority list¹²⁴ and that Ford was making it clear to the Soviets that 'the future of Southern Africa is the concern of America and the West'.¹²⁵ However, Angola had starkly illustrated to the United States the negative implications of dealing with South Africa in terms of African politics. Whereas the United States had hoped tacit cooperation with South Africa would stem communist involvement in Angola, in fact this had opened the way to greater Soviet and Cuban intervention by removing any risk of united African opposition. Kissinger invited South Africa to participate in his initiative, solely because he realised that Rhodesia's dependence on South Africa made South African cooperation necessary. This was the narrow basis on which South African-American cooperation was based. The administration of Democrat President Jimmy Carter ushered in a tougher American policy towards South Africa and a period of increased tension between the two countries. In May 1977, Vorster met with Carter's Vice President, Walter Mondale, who made it clear that the United States did not consider white minority rule in South Africa to be stable in the long term. Mondale informed Vorster that the constructive relations which United States would prefer with South Africa would suffer if there was not 'a change of course' towards the ending of racial discrimination and the goal of 'full political participation by all citizens of South Africa'.¹²⁶

In October 1977, the United Nations adopted a mandatory arms embargo against South Africa¹²⁷ and South Africa's actions in Angola were mentioned in evidence.¹²⁸ South Africa's military involvement in Angola

¹²⁰ National Security Archive, *South Africa*, p. 122.

¹²¹ J. Whitaker, 'Africa and US Interests', in J. Whitaker (ed.), *Africa and the United States*, pp. 2-3; *New York Times*, 27 April 1976.

¹²² Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, p. 84.

¹²³ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp. 39-40.

¹²⁴ *South African Digest*, 2 July 1976. The *South African Digest* was a propaganda vehicle for the South African Department of Information: Winter, *Inside BOSS*, p. 489.

¹²⁵ *To the Point*, 2 July 1976, p. 9. *To the Point* was funded by the South African Department of Information: De Villiers, *Secret Information*, p. 77.

¹²⁶ Warren, *United States - South African Foreign Relations*, p. 121.

¹²⁷ United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, *Apartheid's Threat to World Peace*, section 4. A voluntary arms embargo had been adopted in 1963.

was said to 'constitute a threat to international peace and security'.¹²⁹ In June 1975, the United States, Britain and France had vetoed a similar resolution¹³⁰ and Japan and Italy had abstained.¹³¹ In January 1976, J.D. Van der Vyver, Professor of Law at Potchefstroom University and a supporter of the Nationalist government, had condemned 'South Africa's Angola escapade' as probably 'the greatest blunder of the century' on the grounds that South Africa's 1920 League of Nations mandate over South West Africa had specified that South Africa should not maintain a military presence in the territory. Van der Vyver claimed that, because South Africa had launched its invasion of Angola from Namibia, South Africa now faced a far greater possibility of a positive finding by the United Nations Security Council that its activities in Namibia constituted a threat to international peace. In terms of the United Nations Charter this would justify the implementation of compulsory sanctions against South Africa. Van der Vyver also predicted that a decision by the Security Council to impose such sanctions would not be vetoed by France, the United Kingdom or the United States.¹³² In contrast, John Dugard, Professor of Law at the University of Witwatersrand, claimed that the United Nations would not impose mandatory sanctions as the United States had supported South Africa's involvement in Angola, and consequently would veto any resolution that reflected upon South Africa's activities in Angola.¹³³ It was Van der Vyver who was proved correct. By 1977, following Angola, the Soweto uprisings of 1976 and the murder in detention of the Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko, South Africa had no such support in the West. All the Western powers including the United States declined to veto the embargo.¹³⁴ International pressure on South Africa had reached a new level.

¹²⁸ A. Seegers, *Dimensions of Militarisation: Separate Development, State Structures and the Rise of the Military in South Africa* (Conference on Economic Development and Racial Domination, University of Western Cape, 8-10 October 1984), p. 27.

¹²⁹ J. Van der Vyver, 'The Dakar Conference on Namibia and Human Rights', in J. Van der Vyver, J. Dugard & J. Serfontein (eds), *South West Africa/Namibia: A Symposium* (Paper of the proceedings of a symposium of the South African Institute of International Affairs at Jan Smuts House on 28 January 1976, Braamfontein, published May 1976), p. 5.

¹³⁰ National Security Archive, *South Africa*, p. 50.

¹³¹ Geyser (ed.), *B.J. Vorster*, p. 11.

¹³² Van der Vyver, 'The Dakar Conference', p. 5.

¹³³ J. Dugard, 'South West Africa/Namibia, The Dakar Conference and Détente', in J. Van der Vyver, J. Dugard & J. Serfontein (eds), *South West Africa/Namibia*, pp. 7-8.

¹³⁴ Seegers, *Dimensions of Militarisation*, p. 27.

DOMESTIC REACTION TO THE WAR

SOUTH AFRICAN PRESS

'The British newspaper reader still knows far more about the South African involvement in Angola than do the South African families whose men have been fighting there'.
(*The Guardian*, 27 January 1976).

Within South Africa the government invoked official secrecy and defence legislation on all news of their intervention in Angola. Although the National Party paid lip service to the democratic importance of a free press it had, in fact, developed a draconian censorship apparatus. The government employed 'repressive tolerance', allowing a certain level of dissenting discourse in order to promote an image of South Africa as a liberal society. Consequently, 'censorship became an integral part of the South African condition, affecting every facet of life'¹³⁵ and *The Newspaperman's Guide to the Law* became every editor's bible.¹³⁶ According to one leading journalist: 'We had two South Africas, the official version and the real one.'¹³⁷ The government's complete news blackout regarding its invasion of Angola took restrictions on the press to an unprecedented level. It was possible because the Official Secrets Act (No. 16 of 1956) in conjunction with the Defence Amendment Act (No. 85 of 1967) prohibited the publication of virtually all matters concerned with South Africa's defence, without the express permission of the Minister of Defence.¹³⁸ 'Official secrets' were widely defined to include 'anything relating to munitions of war or any military, police, or security matter'.¹³⁹ The Defence Act prohibited newspapers from publishing any statement 'relating to any member of the SADF or any activity of the SADF or any force of a foreign country which is calculated to prejudice or embarrass the government in its foreign relations or to alarm or depress members of the public'.¹⁴⁰ The broad scope, and intentional vagueness, of this legislation led newspapers to

¹³⁵ C. Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (David Philip Publishers, Cape Town, 1994), p. 2. According to Merrett, 'One of the biggest secrets in South Africa is the extent of government secrecy': C. Merrett, *What's Public is Propaganda, What's Secret is Serious: Official Secrecy and Freedom of Information in South Africa* (talk delivered to the Western Cape Library and Information Workers' Organisation, 7 October 1993).

¹³⁶ K. Stuart, *The Newspaperman's Guide to the Law* (Butterworths Publishers, Durban, 1977).

¹³⁷ Interview with Wilf Nussey.

¹³⁸ A. Matthews, *The Darker Reaches of Government: Access to Information About Public Administration in Three Societies* (Juta, Cape Town, Johannesburg, 1978), p. 146; A. Hepple, *Press under Apartheid* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1974), p. 48.

¹³⁹ W. Hachten & A. Gifford, *The Press and Apartheid: Repression and Propaganda in South Africa* (Macmillan Press, London, 1984), p. 117; Chimutengwende, *South Africa: The Press and the Politics of Liberation*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ K. Satchwell, 'The Power to Defend: An Analysis of Various Aspects of the Defence Act', in J. Cock & L. Nathan (eds), *War and Society*, pp. 46-47.

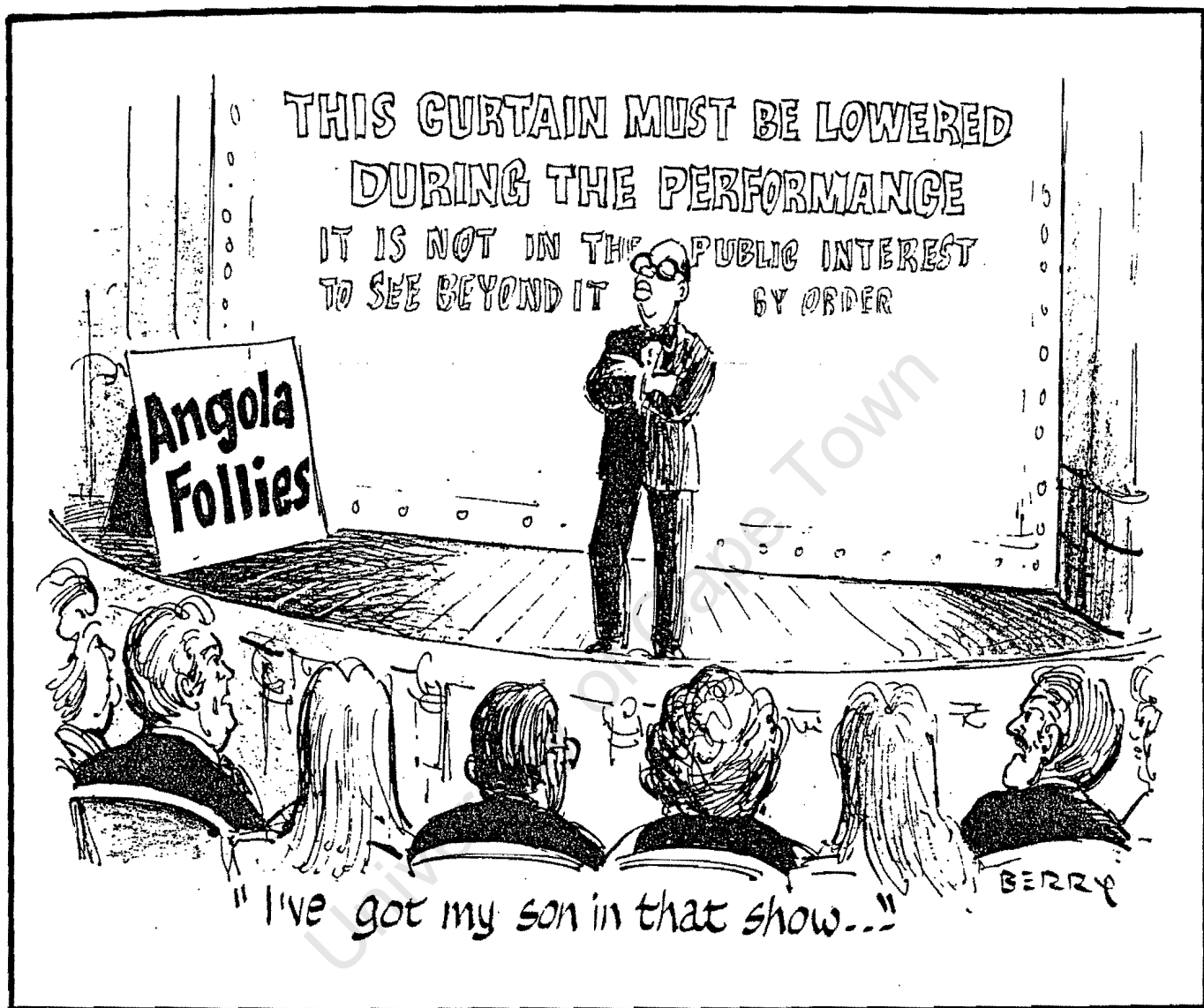


Figure 6: The Official Secrets Act in conjunction with the Defence Amendment Act prohibited the publication of virtually all matters concerned with South Africa's defence, without the express permission of the Minister of Defence, P.W. Botha.

[A. Berry, *Act by Act: 40 Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa, A Cartoon History of Apartheid* (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1989), p. 60]

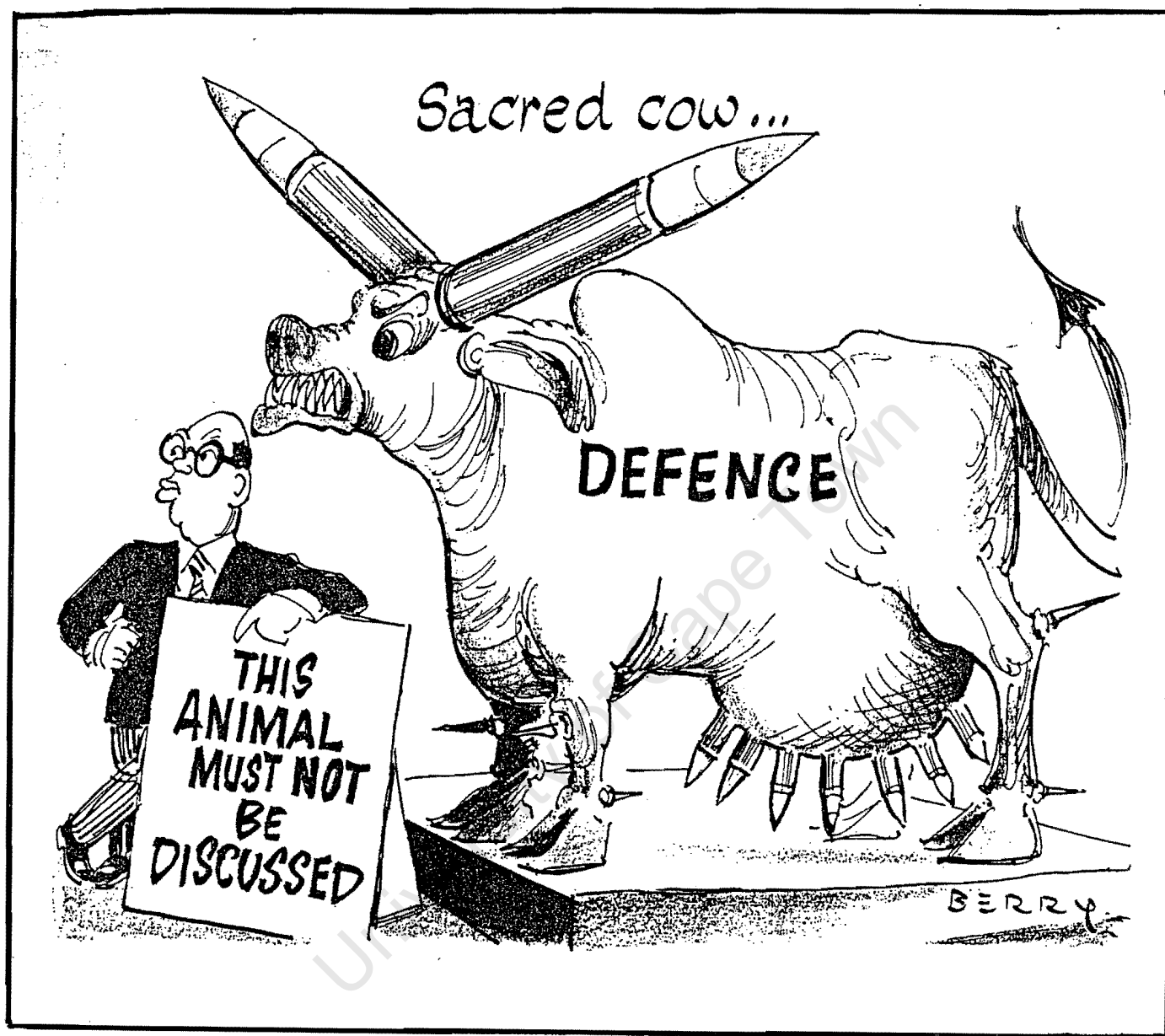


Figure 7: The Defence Act prohibited newspapers from publishing any statement 'relating to any member of the SADF or any activity of the SADF or any force of a foreign country which is calculated to prejudice or embarrass the government in its foreign relations or to alarm or depress members of the public'.

[A. Berry, *Act by Act: 40 Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa, A Cartoon History of Apartheid* (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1989), p. 59]

refer all matters connected with defence, no matter how tenuously, to the defence authorities prior to publication.¹⁴¹ In this way the press employed what became, in effect, self-censorship.¹⁴²

During the war in Angola, Botha issued confidential directives to the South African media, banning reports or speculation concerning South African troop movements and activities.¹⁴³ Editors were warned that unauthorised publication of information would result in the Defence Act being invoked against them.¹⁴⁴ Consequently, press coverage of the war was almost completely dependent on official press releases and thus open to official manipulation. Graeme Addison commented in his study of South African press censorship that, 'Once there is censorship it is not possible to regard the officially-permitted material as anything but deliberate propaganda, no matter how accurate specific items of published information may be'.¹⁴⁵ In May 1976, the South African Society of Journalists, at its annual congress, condemned the way in which the South African press had become 'unwilling victims of a conspiracy of silence' by being unable to report what had happened in Angola. The society stated: 'As journalists, we insist on the right to public enquiry and public debate on the Angolan war, and we demand to know the facts... The Government has subverted the Press and its role as watchdog of the public interest, and the honesty and integrity of the Press has been brought into question'.¹⁴⁶ It claimed that only information flattering to the government had been cleared for publication, thus turning the South African press into a 'propaganda machine'.¹⁴⁷ Henri Geyser, military correspondent for *The Argus* and a Citizen Force member in Angola during 1976, asked to be relieved of the defence post on the paper shortly after the war. He felt that to continue 'would be a propaganda exercise'.¹⁴⁸

Although constrained by censorship legislation, some South African newspapers did strive to inform the South African public about events in Angola. As a result the long-standing antagonism between the National Party government and the English-language press reached a new level. Whilst the Afrikaans-language press was an integrated part of the National Party and government machine, the English-language press was increasingly perceived as being little short of an extra-parliamentary opposition.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, given the United Party's failure to oppose the government in any real sense, in practice the English-language press was the only legal opposition during this period.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴¹ E. Potter, *The Press as Opposition: The Political Role of South African Newspapers* (Chatto & Windus, London, 1975), p. 122.

¹⁴² This tendency was strengthened by a press code of conduct administered by the National Press Union, which comprised virtually all South African newspapers: Potter, *The Press as Opposition*, p. 109.

¹⁴³ These directives were issued on 11 August, 16 August, 30 October, 30 December 1975, 6 January and 15 January 1976.

¹⁴⁴ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 137.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁴⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 25 April 1976.

¹⁴⁷ Burgess et al., *The Great White Hoax*, p. 19.

¹⁴⁸ Telephone interview with Henri Geyser.

¹⁴⁹ Potter, *The Press as Opposition*, p. 27.

¹⁵⁰ Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, p. 66.

The most overt protest against censorship during the war came from the *Rand Daily Mail*, which twice in four days carried blank spaces on its front page to indicate stories that had been censored. On 15 November 1975, a notice below a blank column told readers that: 'A report on Angola which would have occupied this space has not been published because permission, which is required in terms of the law for such publication, has not been granted'.¹⁵¹ The main story of 18 November, headed 'More servicemen killed in action', began with a large blank space, in which was written: 'For reasons totally unrelated to military considerations or the security of the state, an announcement of the death in action last Thursday of South African servicemen has been delayed by the Defence authorities'. Above the space was a photograph of one of the casualties, Lieutenant Christopher Robin, along with a copy of his funeral notice, which had appeared in the paper's classified section the previous day.¹⁵² Botha castigated the editor, Raymond Louw, for this stance.¹⁵³ He threatened government action against the paper after it published a satirical description of a horseback invasion of Angola by a Boer War-type general, easily identified as Botha.¹⁵⁴ In March 1976, the paper's military correspondent, Bob Hitchcock, had his official SADF accreditation removed.¹⁵⁵ At the start of that month, he had called on the government to 'quit the war we can't win. The chances of withdrawing from Angola with clean hands are long gone. But the dangerous risk of getting them bloodier yet...grows every hour we continue to dally on foreign soil'.¹⁵⁶ Following Vorster's announcement that South African troops would withdraw by 27 March, the paper's editorial was headed 'Angolan blunder: the reckoning'. It claimed the venture had been characterised by 'misjudgements, mistakes, miscalculations and precipitation of possible disastrous consequences still to come'.¹⁵⁷

Alongside the *Rand Daily Mail* the *Cape Times* was the other South African newspaper to campaign tirelessly for the South African public to be given more information about developments in Angola. On 18 November 1975 a strongly worded article, entitled 'Angola and South Africa', stressed that if events made it necessary for South Africa to become involved in a conflict between East and West, 'the South African public must be kept fully informed and not dragged in total ignorance from the tested policy of non-involvement'. Anthony Heard, the editor of the *Cape Times*, heard during a confidential talk on 19 November with Vorster, with whom he maintained cordial relations, that South African forces had been sent to help take Luanda. Heard found himself in a professional dilemma: 'South Africa was invading

¹⁵¹ The item was to have been the British Independent Television report showing South African troops and armoured cars in Angola: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 183.

¹⁵² Robin's parents had only been allowed to attribute his death to a 'fatal accident': Tyson, *Editors Under Fire*, p. 177.

¹⁵³ I. Stewart, *South Africa: Press Freedom?* (Paper presented to Black Sash Congress, March 1979, Africa Bureau Document, paper 22, 1979), p. 2; *Rand Daily Mail*, 19 November 1975.

¹⁵⁴ Woods, *Asking for Trouble*, pp. 255-256.

¹⁵⁵ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁶ *Rand Daily Mail*, 3 March 1976.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 23 March 1976.

another country and I was sworn to silence'.¹⁵⁸ Consequently the *Cape Times* led the veiled criticism in the press, especially in deputy editor Gerald Shaw's weekly 'Political Survey' column.¹⁵⁹ Shaw's criticism earned him personal rebukes from Botha, who described him in Parliament as 'an unfair fellow' and a 'fifth columnist' who wrote 'subversive' articles.¹⁶⁰ When news broke of South African prisoners of war Shaw's column stated: 'You cannot take a country to war on foreign soil without discussion in Parliament and without the support of public opinion...South Africans have been grievously misled'.¹⁶¹ On 20 January 1976 a leader in the *Cape Times* demanded answers from the government to four questions: 1) Is South Africa fighting in the Angolan civil war? 2) If so, why have we departed from our policy of non-intervention in the affairs of our neighbours? 3) Why was the public not kept informed? 4) What is the extent of our present commitment and what will it be in the future? A year later an editorial in the *Cape Times*, referred to the Angolan involvement as 'an act of folly' and as 'a political and diplomatic debacle, a blunder for which the country has already paid dearly'.¹⁶²

As a result of the *Cape Times*' criticism of the government's policy on Angola, a vendetta developed between that paper and the Afrikaans-language *Die Burger*. Botha was a director of Nasionale Pers, *Die Burger*'s management board¹⁶³, and the paper questioned the patriotism of the *Cape Times*. Similarly, *Die Transvaler* dismissed most criticism of the government as being politically inspired. It insisted that the majority of South Africa's population supported the government's actions and claimed that South African sacrifices had been worthwhile.¹⁶⁴ However, some Afrikaans-language newspapers in the Transvaal-based Perskor group discreetly pointed out the widespread confusion surrounding the government's actions in Angola.¹⁶⁵ The most overtly critical was *Die Vaderland*, which earned the wrath of Botha when it reported in November that South African troops had been killed in Angola. Botha denied the report (which was true) and accused *Die Vaderland* of breaking the Defence Act.¹⁶⁶ In Parliament, Botha criticised 'some of South Africa's own reporters' for violating the government's 'trust' and 'certain newspapers of both languages...which did us a disservice'.¹⁶⁷ At a February 1976 meeting with representatives of the National

¹⁵⁸ Heard, *The Cape of Storms*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁹ R. Pollack, *Up Against Apartheid: The Role and Plight of the Press in South Africa* (Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale, Illinois, 1981), p. 52. The chairman of the National Party in Camps Bay, Cape Town, G. Trevor Robertson, conducted a lengthy correspondence with the *Cape Times*. He maintained that the government had acted correctly with regards to Angola and that the paper was 'trying to score points' for the Progressive Reform Party and undermine confidence in the government: Letters to editor, 22 December 1975, 17 January 1976, 4 February 1976, *Cape Times Collection* (Manuscripts & Archives Library, University of Cape Town).

¹⁶⁰ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 54; 6 May 1976, cols. 6211-6212.

¹⁶¹ *Cape Times*, 20 December 1975.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, 7 February 1977.

¹⁶³ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁴ *Die Transvaler*, 26 March 1976.

¹⁶⁵ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 97.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 105.

¹⁶⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 54.

Press Union, Botha formally complained about the way certain newspapers had leaked news of South Africa's involvement in Angola and had protested against official news policy.¹⁶⁸ In Parliament in May 1976, Botha complained about the behaviour of the *Cape Times* and the *Rand Daily Mail* in particular, 'newspapers which brim over with disloyalty to South Africa.'¹⁶⁹

DOMESTIC POLITICAL DEBATE & PARLIAMENT

'Between October 1975 and March 1976, debate about the rights and wrongs of South African policy in Angola dominated political discussion in South Africa in a way that no other issue of foreign affairs has done at least in the course of the last decade'.
(Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 349).

In stark contrast to South Africa's entry into both world wars, both of which processes were accompanied by considerable domestic turmoil¹⁷⁰, it was only after South African troops had already been committed in Angola that the issue was publicly debated. Between June 1975 and January 1976 Parliament had been in recess. According to Deon Geldenhuys, who attempted to reconstruct the decision-making process during the Angolan episode in his book *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making*, Vorster and Botha toyed with the idea of convening a special *in camera* session of Parliament towards the end of 1975 in order to inform MPs of developments in Angola.¹⁷¹ However, they decided against taking Parliament into their confidence for fear of leaks by the opposition parties, specifically the Progressive Reform Party.¹⁷² In January 1976, at the beginning of the new parliamentary session, the government was criticised by the two opposition parties because the invasion had not been sanctioned by Parliament. By this time, following the OAU meeting in mid-January, the decision to withdraw from Angola had already come into effect.

Eschel Rhoodie, the ex-Secretary for Information, later made the extraordinary claim that even Vorster, as Prime Minister, had been kept in the dark by Botha: 'Vorster swore to Dr Mulder [Cornelius 'Connie' Mulder, the Minister of Information] and General van den Bergh that he did not know what was going on

¹⁶⁸ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 60.

¹⁶⁹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, col. 6211; 7 May 1976, col. 6301.

¹⁷⁰ On the ramifications of the commitment of South African troops outside of South Africa see: K. Grundy, *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics: The Evolution of a White South African Nation as Reflected in the Controversy Over the Assignment of Armed Forces Abroad, 1912-1976* (Papers in International Studies, Africa Series No. 33, Ohio University Center for International Studies, Athens, 1978).

¹⁷¹ The Defence Act provided that if mobilisation was ordered and Parliament was in session, the reason was to be communicated to it forthwith. If Parliament was not sitting, then it had to be reconvened within thirty days: South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1976*, p. 36.

¹⁷² Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 82.

until it was too late... Botha converted, on his own, the limited, defensive role played by South African troops in guarding the northern water supplies of South West Africa, into an active invasion'.¹⁷³ Rhoodie claimed that Botha authorised the SADF to pursue, to Luanda if necessary, those terrorists that had targeted Calueque, so presenting Vorster and his Cabinet with a *fait accompli*.¹⁷⁴ This accusation was also supported by Van den Bergh. Allister Sparks recalled a conversation with the ex-head of BOSS, some years later, in which Van den Bergh claimed that the Angolan operation was not discussed in advance with Vorster and that Botha had acted on his own, telling Vorster that the task force was only going to protect Calueque, whilst privately authorising it to strike much deeper into Angola.¹⁷⁵ General du Toit has since claimed: 'P.W. Botha was a doer not a talker. He thought it [intervention in Angola] was the right thing to do. If he hadn't been Minister of Defence we probably wouldn't have gone in.'¹⁷⁶

However, Deon Geldenhuys refuted the charge that South Africa's intervention in Angola had been Botha's 'personal adventure' and that he had unilaterally ensured that South Africa became embroiled in a foreign war. He identified Vorster and Botha together, as 'the two principal (if not the only) political decision makers who were to control South Africa's military involvement in the Angolan war'.¹⁷⁷ Although Botha was 'the driving force between their joint decisions, a man whose strong views more often than not prevailed', Vorster had been involved in the political decision-making from the outset. Geldenhuys claimed: 'It would have been quite inconceivable for the head of government not to have been a party to such far-reaching decisions as involving South Africa as a war beyond its borders'.¹⁷⁸ Vorster later told Parliament that he had 'full confidence' in Botha and his handling of the Angolan situation, adding: 'I was with him all the way in this matter.'¹⁷⁹ Indeed, it must be noted that Van den Bergh and Botha had long shared an antipathy towards each other and, at the time of his allegations, Van den Bergh was a bitter man having recently been forced to resign.¹⁸⁰ Rhoodie, disgraced and in exile following the exposure of the misuse of public funds by the Department of Information, also had his own axe to grind and harboured a personal antipathy towards Botha.¹⁸¹ Yet the fact that these allegations were repeated, and apparently

¹⁷³ E. Rhoodie, *P.W. Botha: The Last Betrayal* (S.A. Politics, Melville, 1989), p. 194.

¹⁷⁴ Rhoodie, *The Real Information Scandal*, pp. 144-145; Rhoodie, *P.W. Botha*, p. 195.

¹⁷⁵ Sparks, *The Mind of South Africa*, pp. 304-305.

¹⁷⁶ Telephone interview with General Hein du Toit.

¹⁷⁷ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 79.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 82.

¹⁷⁹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 359.

¹⁸⁰ General Hein du Toit explained: 'Van den Bergh didn't like the Defence Force and he didn't like the influence Botha had. He considered himself the power behind the throne': Interview with General du Toit. Van den Bergh later joined the extreme right-wing Conservative Party.

¹⁸¹ Rhoodie also alleged that Botha had tried (without Vorster's knowledge) to supply weapons and assistance to counter-revolutionaries trying to unseat President Machel but had been foiled when Van den Bergh's BOSS agents immobilised the military equipment. Similarly Rhoodie claimed that whilst Vorster had been exerting strong pressure on the Smith regime in 1975, Botha had secretly assembled a unit of South African paratroopers to assist Rhodesia, and that Vorster had stood the unit down just in the nick of time: Rhoodie, *P.W. Botha*, pp. 72, 196; Rhoodie interviewed in Rees & Day, *Muldergate*, p. 202.

believed, by some journalists and political commentators is a telling reflection of how Vorster's style of government was regarded.

Geldenhuis cited South Africa's involvement in the Angolan war as an outstanding example of 'a seriously deficient decision-making process under Vorster'.¹⁸² Vorster typically displayed a preference for unstructured decision-making involving only a small inner circle.¹⁸³ Therefore, far from the cabinet model of government that Vorster professed to be following, decision-making 'was not infrequently a rather haphazard process involving only a tiny number of participants – a far cry from a structured concept of government allowing for inputs from a variety of interested parties'.¹⁸⁴ Although the formulation of policy was not the one-man affair it had been under Verwoerd, it remained a secretive, cliquey, 'almost cabalistic' business.¹⁸⁵ Robert Jaster judged that: 'There is no doubt that the Angolan debacle occurred because of Vorster's inexperience in foreign affairs and his personalised and unsystematic approach to major policy decisions.'¹⁸⁶

Although Botha's official biography claimed that the Cabinet was consulted at every stage of the gradually escalating South African involvement¹⁸⁷, in fact neither the full Cabinet nor the National Party caucus had been consulted about the invasion of Angola.¹⁸⁸ The climax of South Africa's involvement in Angola coincided with the Christmas vacation, during which Cabinet members were away from office and they only learnt the true state of affairs in Angola at their first meeting after the Christmas holiday. Historically the sidelining of Cabinet to a peripheral role was not entirely unusual: 'South Africa lacks a body of experience or even precedent for decision making in times of emergency or crisis as a consequence of her former complete dependency on the British government in such matters... [W]hen one looks at the experience of South African cabinets in the past it is indeed astonishing to see how little they were concerned with the conduct of the wars in which their forces were involved and to which the taking of decisions was abdicated almost entirely'.¹⁸⁹

Despite having been kept in the dark, the Cabinet presented a united front when the Angolan issue was discussed in Parliament. This was not very surprising. Given the strict discipline the National Party demanded of its MPs and the severe penalties for breaching it, the Party could usually count on their

¹⁸² Geldenhuis, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 75.

¹⁸³ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁴ Geldenhuis, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 74.

¹⁸⁵ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 55. In other instances General van den Bergh had been Vorster's main if not sole adviser. The Information Scandal again revealed Vorster as being surrounded by only a handful of advisers.

¹⁸⁶ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁷ De Villiers, *PW*, pp. 241-277.

¹⁸⁸ However, according to Geldenhuis, the Executive Council of the elite Afrikaner Broederbond was made privy to confidential information on South Africa's involvement in Angola: Geldenhuis, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp. 82, 173.

complete support.¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, on foreign policy issues the National Party showed a high degree of consensus; its MPs and supporters were neither particularly interested nor well informed, and generally accepted the views expressed by the leadership.¹⁹¹ As one National Party parliamentarian commented: 'In South Africa the people are overwhelmingly uncritical of the leadership. We politicians subscribe to the maxim: act, then talk. We first proceed, and then we explain'.¹⁹²

The tendency to regard national interests and the National Party's interests as one and the same, meant that many Nationalist MPs perceived criticism of the government's policies on foreign affairs and security as questionable, even disloyal.¹⁹³ The chairman of the National Party's parliamentary defence group, H.J. Coetsee, claimed that the lives that had been lost in Angola 'could be rendered fruitless through irresponsible conduct...Their deaths may have been in vain if people to the far right of the political spectrum were to be allowed to disseminate lies and attempt to demoralise our people serving in the Defence Force. It could also be the case if certain persons on the far left were to continue to call into question the legality of the actions of our Government.'¹⁹⁴

The 'far right' to which Coetsee referred was the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP), the *verkrampste* (inward-looking) breakaway faction from the National Party. In the April 1974 general election, the Party had not gained a single seat.¹⁹⁵ Parliamentary opposition in South Africa was therefore confined to parties representing political 'liberals', mainly from South Africa's English-speaking community. The 'far left' was occupied by the small Progressive Reform Party (PRP), which had eleven sitting members. The official Opposition, the United Party, held only 41 seats out of a total of 171 and was in the last stages of its decline.¹⁹⁶ The Nationalist hold on power seemed unassailable and meant that there was no need for the government to bargain with opposition parties to win their support, or even to explain its policies to them. Whilst government leaders frequently consulted Opposition leaders on specific issues, they did not consider this a regular or obligatory parliamentary practice.

Vorster disclosed to Parliament that he had personally briefed Sir De Villiers Graaff, the leader of the United Party, about Angolan developments from time to time.¹⁹⁷ However, according to Graaff he was first

¹⁸⁹ Fourie, 'The Evolving Experience', p. 87.

¹⁹⁰ Senator Denis Worrall, the National Party candidate in a by-election in Durban North, was officially 'rapped over the knuckles' after he claimed that South Africa had been involved in Angola with the support of the United States, Zaire, Zambia and the Ivory Coast. He rapidly retracted the statement: *Cape Times*, 19 February 1976.

¹⁹¹ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, pp. 20, 23-24.

¹⁹² Quoted in T. Hanf et al., *South Africa: The Prospects of Peaceful Change*, p. 175.

¹⁹³ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 56.

¹⁹⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 68.

¹⁹⁵ Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, p. 367.

¹⁹⁶ Dalcanton, 'Vorster and the Politics of Confidence', p. 179. It was eventually dissolved in 1977 and succeeded by the New Republic Party.

¹⁹⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, cols. 366-367.

informed of South Africa's intervention only in late 1975, when there were already rumours of it in foreign newspapers. He did not share the information with the MPs in his shadow cabinet.¹⁹⁸ Although he kept Vorster's confidence he appealed to the Prime Minister to tell the public what was happening in Angola.¹⁹⁹ The failure 'to take the public into its confidence, and to motivate it adequately in regard to the Government's actions and objectives in Angola' was cited by Graaff as grounds for his customary motion of no confidence in the government. He claimed that the position in Angola was 'uppermost in the minds of most people as an area of immediate danger' and called for 'the fullest possible disclosure of information'.²⁰⁰ Although his motion of no confidence was defeated, Graaff was satisfied that the debate 'resulted in the public getting a lot of the information to which it was entitled without damage being done to the morale of troops or security'.²⁰¹

Graaff did not object to South Africa's intervention *per se*, but rather the secrecy in which it was conducted. In Parliament he conceded that 'there are tactical arguments – and I have heard some that are most persuasive – to justify a calculated degree of support to the groups that are resisting the assault...by forces assisted by Cuban soldiers and Russian arms and advice.' He agreed that, 'South Africa cannot ignore the military intervention of a foreign communist-spearheaded consortium in Southern Africa whose declared intention it is to take Angola and to use it as a springboard for further aggression.'²⁰² Graaff supported a motion from Vorster, which only the Progressive Reform Party objected to, outlining 'grave concern at the Communist aggression committed in Angola by Russia and Cuba', the likelihood that similar aggression would be directed at South West Africa and South Africa, and directing the government 'to take all reasonable steps to foil this aggression and to safeguard our country as well as the territories and borders for which we are responsible'.²⁰³ When Graaff met Henry Kissinger later in 1976 he followed the government line and questioned the Secretary of State 'as to whether he was satisfied with the withdrawal of American support to South Africa and UNITA in Angola, which had resulted in a Communist takeover in the country with the aid of the Cubans'.²⁰⁴

The most outspoken critic from within the ranks of the United Party was Japie Basson, the Party's leader in the Transvaal and spokesman on foreign affairs.²⁰⁵ He had repeatedly warned against direct intervention in

¹⁹⁸ Telephone interview with Japie Basson.

¹⁹⁹ Vorster told Graaff that as a result of attacks on the Ruacana scheme the SADF had engaged in hot pursuits and so found itself involved in the civil war. He assured Graaff that the Government's actions had the support and assistance of the American and French administrations. Graaff claimed he only subsequently discovered that the CIA was involved in Angola without the knowledge of Congress: Graaff, *Div Looks Back*, p. 242.

²⁰⁰ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, cols. 25-26.

²⁰¹ Graaff, *Div Looks Back*, p. 243.

²⁰² Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, cols. 28-29.

²⁰³ Ibid, 30 January 1976, col. 356.

²⁰⁴ Graaff, *Div Looks Back*, p. 256.

²⁰⁵ Telephone interview with Japie Basson.

Angola.²⁰⁶ At a public meeting in Middelburg, the week before the opening of Parliament, he claimed that South Africa's involvement in Angola not only posed grave new dangers for South Africa, but also had a serious effect on the future of South West Africa. He stressed that the two main pillars of the country's foreign policy: non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other countries and the undertaking that South West Africa would not be used as a basis for military action across the border, had been thrown overboard.²⁰⁷ In Parliament Basson claimed: 'For the first time in years the Government is out of touch with what is going on amongst the people outside.'²⁰⁸ Although he declared that: 'There is no right-minded person in South Africa who does not realise the danger of the communist threat', he queried why the government considered the situation in Angola to be different from that in Mozambique or Madagascar, where Marxist states had recently been declared.²⁰⁹ As a result of his speech Connie Mulder, the Minister of Information, called Basson's patriotism into question.²¹⁰

Vorster thanked Graaff and the United Party's defence spokesman, Vause Raw, for their 'understanding' and 'the spirit in which they discussed matters with us'.²¹¹ Raw had opened his comment on the debate with veiled criticism of the Progressive Reform Party for 'the anxiety with which they have called for special sessions and have tried to conduct the debate in the Press.'²¹² He criticised 'the Progressive generals...who came to the military conclusions that led to their decisions on whether we should or should not have been in Angola.'²¹³ In December, the leader of the Progressive Reform Party, Colin Eglin, had asked for Parliament to be summoned but the United Party claimed this was unnecessary.²¹⁴ The PRP also asked Botha to make a statement on Angola the day Parliament opened but this was also rejected.²¹⁵ Eglin was not briefed on Angola as Vorster 'was afraid to run the risk'. Vorster explained to Parliament, 'I was not afraid because I did not trust the hon. member, but because the hon. member and members of his party go along with people I do not trust.'²¹⁶

In Parliament Eglin was more outspoken than Graaff. He declared that the government's decision to intervene in Angola was 'an error of political judgement which could seriously prejudice and jeopardize the future security of South Africa'.²¹⁷ He claimed the government's failure to take the people of South Africa

²⁰⁶ For example: *Cape Times*, 5 December 1975, and 13 December 1975.

²⁰⁷ *Cape Times*, 21 January 1976. This earned him a personal rebuke from Vorster who asked him in Parliament: 'Why do you not take your seat where your mouth is?': Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 370.

²⁰⁸ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 27 January 1976, col. 119.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 27 January 1976, cols. 123-124.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 27 January 1976, col. 139.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 30 January 1976, col. 375.

²¹² *Ibid*, 26 January 1976, col. 58.

²¹³ *Ibid*, 26 January 1976, col. 67.

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 28 January 1976, col. 265; 9 February 1976, col. 833.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 2 February 1976, col. 427.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 30 January 1976, col. 367.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, 27 January 1976, col. 104.

into its confidence had 'destroyed a bond of trust which traditionally exists in South Africa between the people on the one hand and the Government on the other'.²¹⁸ He challenged the government line that South African troops were only involved in protecting the country's borders and interest in the Cunene hydroelectric scheme²¹⁹ and continued to call for the withdrawal of all South African troops.²²⁰ Eglin claimed the government had underestimated both the extent to which South Africa's involvement could be seen to legitimise the Soviets' involvement and the sophistication of the weapons which the Russians and the Cubans would employ. Furthermore, the government had overestimated the probable response of the West, particularly the United States.²²¹ Eglin stressed that Angola 'has revealed that even at a time when we claimed that we were fighting the cause of the free world, we could not count on a single active participating ally in the West'.²²² The Progressive Reform Party called for domestic reform in order to regain Western support for South Africa. The party's defence spokesman, Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert, stressed that it was necessary for the government to take action if it were to retain the loyalty of all its people, including blacks and coloureds: 'We shall have to continue to create circumstances here in South Africa in which we shall all be prepared to defend this society everywhere and at all times against any outside aggression.'²²³

In early May 1976, Botha challenged the PRP in Parliament over a pamphlet that had been distributed from house to house in Cape Town. Entitled 'Angola and its consequences' it described the intervention in Angola as a 'disastrous blunder' which had been counterproductive and jeopardised the security of South Africa, by causing a massive escalation by Russia and Cuba and the increased militarisation of SWAPO. The pamphlet stated: 'The PRP stands for the effective defence of South Africa... We believe we can best secure our country and counter the dangers of communism and external aggression by necessary internal change'.²²⁴ Botha condemned the pamphlet's 'blatant lies' as 'a base and vile attempt to disparage the Defence Force and to create mistrust' and labelled the author a 'cockroach'.²²⁵

The *Cape Times* claimed that the government had been let off lightly in the debate over Angola because opposition parties placed national interest above party interests.²²⁶ In fact, the Angolan episode had underscored the ineffectuality of opposition politics in South Africa, reflecting both the impotency of the opposition parties and the diminishing importance of Parliament as an arena of political debate. The government had clearly shown its disregard for Parliament, and its perceived need for secrecy had effectively circumscribed the role of the House of Assembly in the decision-making process. One political

²¹⁸ Ibid, 27 January 1976, col. 101.

²¹⁹ Ibid, 27 January 1976, cols. 101-102.

²²⁰ Ibid, 16 February 1976, col. 1271.

²²¹ Ibid, 27 January 1976, col. 105.

²²² Ibid, 27 January 1976, col. 107.

²²³ Ibid, 27 January 1976, col. 144-145.

²²⁴ Ibid, 6 May 1976, col. 6226.

²²⁵ Ibid, 6 May 1976, cols. 6209-6211, 6227.

analyst claimed that South Africa's invasion of Angola was a 'watershed event' when the rise of the 'executive state' and the sidelining of the political parties and parliament, as institutions through which support of the citizenry could be mobilised, was manifested for the first time.²²⁷

HERSTIGTE NASIONALE PARTY AND RIGHT-WING OPPOSITION

Although the Herstigte (Reconstituted) National Party had failed to win a single parliamentary seat by 1975, its presence was both vocal and worrying for the government. Led by Dr Albert Hertzog, the HNP was the result of a breakaway from the National Party²²⁸ and served as a persistent reminder of the cleavages within Afrikanerdom, including the broader rift between the so-called *verligtes* ('progressives') and *verkrampes* ('conservatives').²²⁹ The National Party was always more sensitive to opposition from within the ranks of Afrikanerdom itself and consequently the HNP exerted an influence out of all proportion with its size. Given the *verligte/verkrampte* divide there was the fear that, as one Afrikaner political correspondent put it, 'What the HNP says in public a third of the Nationalists think in private'.²³⁰

The Angolan adventure was very unpopular among the Afrikaner right, for 'helping out the Kaffirs'.²³¹ It also gave the HNP ammunition in its attacks on Vorster's policy in Rhodesia. John Stockwell commented: 'Only recently, in March 1975, had it [South Africa] withdrawn its forces from Rhodesia, and racist whites would now question why their sons were fighting for black freedom in Angola'.²³² In late 1976 a South African political observer predicted: 'The line that it was criminal of the government to send South African boys to be killed fighting for Africans in distant Angola and not be allowed to defend their white kith and kin in neighbouring Rhodesia is heady stuff at the stump. It is a theme that will grow louder as the situation deteriorates in Rhodesia and will find an echo in the hearts of many *verkrampte* Nationalists'.²³³ Vorster's defence that the invasion had been in keeping with his détente policy could only serve to aggravate the HNP.²³⁴

²²⁶ *Cape Times*, 31 January 1976.

²²⁷ H. Giliomee, 'The Leader and the Citizenry', in R. Schrire (ed.), *Leadership in the Apartheid State*, p. 126.

²²⁸ It was a response to Vorster's perceived deviation from Verwoerdian Afrikaner exclusivism, as evidenced by his relaxation of apartheid in sport and his 'outward policy'.

²²⁹ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 37.

²³⁰ J. De St. Jorre, 'Inside the Laager: White Power in South Africa', (*Foreign Affairs*, New York, October 1976, Vol. 55, No. 1), pp. 179-180.

²³¹ Adam, 'Ideologies of Dedication', p. 90.

²³² Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 186.

²³³ De St. Jorre, 'Inside the Laager', p. 179.

²³⁴ In 1975, leaders of the HNP had met with Ian Smith and formed a South African Solidarity Conference to generate opposition to détente and support for Rhodesian whites: *Die Transvaler*, 10 May 1975, 12 May 1975.

The HNP newspaper, *Die Afrikaner*, attacked the government for its 'dishonesty' during the war and its alleged abandonment of the seven prisoners of war held in Angola. Following South Africa's withdrawal from Angola, the National Press Union agreed to a SADF 'request' that they avoid giving prominence to the prisoners of war.²³⁵ It was an issue that the government was careful to avoid in the run-up to the 1977 general election. Whilst the rest of the South African press refrained from mentioning the prisoners for over a year²³⁶, at a HNP congress in September 1977 it was decided that *Die Afrikaner* should withdraw from the NPU and conduct a public awareness campaign about the prisoners. Between 6 February 1976 and 15 September 1978²³⁷ the newspaper published eighteen major articles and letters on the subject. One of these articles contained fourteen references to 'young soldiers', 'young men' and 'minors'; another contained thirteen such references. *Die Afrikaner* also published photographs showing the South African prisoners in handcuffs (which the NPU had also agreed not to use) on at least five occasions. A Commission of Inquiry into the Reporting of Security Matters, appointed by Botha at the end of 1979, concluded that: 'The effect of this emotional politically motivated campaign on the next-of-kin of the seven soldiers in particular, and on the next-of-kin of other serving soldiers can be imagined'.²³⁸ However, the sensitivity of the issue was illustrated by that fact that the government took no action against *Die Afrikaner*.

OPPOSITION FROM THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

'Our involvement [in Angola] has been a military miscalculation and a diplomatic disaster for which the country may have to pay a very high price indeed'. (*Financial Mail*, 30 January 1976).

The final cost of Operation Savannah for the Defence Force was estimated to have been \$133million.²³⁹ However, some South African commentators claimed the broader implications of South Africa's intervention had proved much more costly. In March 1976, *The Star* claimed that the Angolan war had led to a steep fall in the price of South African shares; they fell by 25 percent on the London stock exchange between October 1975 and March 1976.²⁴⁰ The *Financial Mail* described how 'a 25 million dollar

²³⁵ The ban on reports went into effect on 27 February 1976 and was not lifted until the men were freed: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, pp. 66, 242 fn.103.

²³⁶ After the prisoners' release it was reported that there had been heated arguments between Botha and some of the parents over his alleged failure to keep them informed: *Sunday Times*, 3 September 1978; *Rand Daily Mail*, 4 September 1978.

²³⁷ All seven prisoners were released on 2 September 1978, in exchange for three Cuban prisoners of war captured by the South Africans in December 1975: 'POW Interlude in Angola', *Paratus*, 29 October 1978, pp. 10-12.

²³⁸ Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Reporting of Security Matters Regarding the South African Defence Force and the South African Police Force* (RP 52/1980, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1980), pp. 76-77.

²³⁹ Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 232.

²⁴⁰ *The Star*, 13 March 1976.

Eurobond loan floated during the Angolan adventure failed dismally'.²⁴¹ The *Financial Mail*, South Africa's leading financial paper, claimed the 'Angolan debacle' had resulted in an outflow of capital, which in turn had been one of the factors that forced Pretoria to increase interest rates, impose import deposits and borrow heavily from the IMF.²⁴²

South Africa's Angola episode coincided with the worst economic recession since the 1930s, the result of an interplay of internal and external factors: a delayed product of the world recession, a devastating fall in the gold price, a high level of government spending and record inflation.²⁴³ Describing the economic outlook in March 1976, the Minister of Finance, Senator O. Horwood said: 'Recent developments in Angola and Mozambique might be thought to have provided an unexpected unfavourable influence on our balance of payments, particularly on the capital account. I am glad to say that in informed and responsible quarters abroad, confidence in the South African economy continues unabated.'²⁴⁴ However, writing in 1977, the South African military correspondent A.J. Venter judged: 'Rumours during the Angola war did much to halt the flow of foreign investment into Southern Africa... We also have the spectre of some South African businessmen packing and leaving the country as a result of uncertainty following the Angolan adventure'.²⁴⁵ R.W. Johnson judged that 'Angola was an economic disaster'²⁴⁶ and Callinicos and Rogers claimed that South African 'big business' had demanded that the government withdraw from Angola because government spending was spiralling and businesses were being forced to compete with the government for funds, so forcing up interest rates.²⁴⁷

Another cause of discontent was the perceived encroachment of military requirements into the business sector. The National Supplies Procurement Act (No. 89 of 1970) had given the Minister of Defence the power to order any individual or company to 'manufacture, produce, process or treat and to supply or deliver or sell' any goods or services to the SADF 'when necessary for the security of South Africa'. The sweeping powers of the Act were first utilised by the government in order to meet a shortage of tents during the intervention in Angola,²⁴⁸ leading some businessmen to fear subordination of production to military purposes.²⁴⁹ The disruption caused by the call-up of Citizen Force units for three-month training camps at the end of 1975, instead of the usual three weeks, was criticised by some businessmen.²⁵⁰ The United

²⁴¹ *Financial Mail*, 2 July 1976.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 13 August 1976.

²⁴³ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 158; D. O'Meara, *Forty Lost Years: The Apartheid State and the Politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1995), pp. 171-176.

²⁴⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 31 March 1976, col. 4236.

²⁴⁵ Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, p. 224.

²⁴⁶ Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, p. 172.

²⁴⁷ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 158.

²⁴⁸ *Financial Mail*, 26 November 1976.

²⁴⁹ P. Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians: Civil-Military Relations in South Africa* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1984), p. 142.

²⁵⁰ *The Star*, 17 January 1976.

Party's spokesman for defence claimed that some of the servicemen who had been called up had been illegally fired by their employers.²⁵¹ Some companies refused to make up the difference between their employees' army pay and their usual civilian salaries.²⁵² According to Willem Steenkamp, some employers refused on the ground that they would not pay for services they had not received, and at least one large employer had stated that he opposed the government's intervention in Angola and saw no reason why he should give it tacit support.²⁵³ Although firms were not legally obliged to make up their employees' pay, Kent Durr of the National Party threatened to draw up a 'roll of shame' of companies not doing so.²⁵⁴ The *Cape Times* criticised Durr for trying to stir up 'party political animus'.²⁵⁵

WHITE PUBLIC OPINION

'Rumour is rife and confusion and concern are growing, particularly amongst parents, wives, girlfriends and relatives of servicemen, simply because statements made by or on behalf of the Minister of Defence and others cannot be reconciled with facts which appear to be obvious.'
(De Villiers Graaff, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976)²⁵⁶

Once news of South Africa's intervention in Angola became available to the rest of the world, the government's attempts to suppress the information within South Africa were rendered counterproductive. Foreign radio broadcasts could be picked up in South Africa, foreign newspapers were on sale and there also existed an effective 'bush telegraph' conveying allegations and rumours amongst the troops.²⁵⁷ Consequently rumours prevailed, leading Botha to declare that: 'Rumour mongers in our midst are as great a danger to South Africa as the terrorists.'²⁵⁸ There were conflicting stories of military successes followed by reports of major disasters.²⁵⁹ Rumours circulated that South African forces were fighting Russians and that Voortrekkerhoogte Military Hospital in Pretoria was filled with casualties. In Parliament Vause Raw of the United Party referred to rumours that troops had been subjected to inhumane suffering and were returning home with shellshock.²⁶⁰

²⁵¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, col. 6164.

²⁵² The Good Hope Comforts Fund, a civilian support organisation for SADF troops, was concerned that dependants of Citizen Force servicemen were financially suffering as a result of the extended call-up system: Letter from President of the Good Hope Comforts Fund to *Paratus*, 27 March 1976, p. 31.

²⁵³ Steenkamp, *Adeus Angola*, p. 36.

²⁵⁴ Telephone interview with Kent Durr.

²⁵⁵ *Cape Times*, 13 January 1976.

²⁵⁶ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 26.

²⁵⁷ Interview with Gerald Shaw.

²⁵⁸ *Sunday Express*, 30 November 1975.

²⁵⁹ Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, p. 220.

²⁶⁰ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 62. The wives of two of the troops involved in Operation Savannah told this author of the psychological problems their husbands suffered as a result of their experiences in Angola. (Confidential interviews, 1 November 2000).

The news blackout in South Africa had worked surprisingly well; white South Africans were 'stunned and horrified' to learn of the capture of four of their soldiers in Angola.²⁶¹ There was also mounting uneasiness over the steady trickle of casualties in the 'operational area',²⁶² which were officially ascribed to contacts with 'terrorists'.²⁶³ The relatives of those that were killed were given no details of where or how their deaths had occurred.²⁶⁴ Botha later announced that 29 South Africans had been killed in action and 14 in accidents between 14 July 1975 and 23 January 1976.²⁶⁵ Until Operation Savannah, South Africa's long-simmering counter-insurgency had cost almost no South African lives. On 18 November, beside a large map of Angola, *The Star* ran a lead report on troop losses in action. On the same day, the *Rand Daily Mail* protested at the lack of information about deaths-in-action released by Defence Headquarters, and both *Die Transvaler* and *Die Vaderland* published lists of casualties (which proved to be incorrect). On 28 November the *Cape Times* pointed out the escalation of 'border' casualties: 11 South Africans, including teenage National Servicemen, had died in the previous month. In his recollections of his national service, Rick Andrew, a young musician living in Cape Town at the time, remembered: 'Every now and then news filtered down that more South African soldiers had been killed in the operational area. The operational area. Was that Angola or the border? No one really knew'.²⁶⁶

The longer-term impact on white South Africans is difficult to gauge from conflicting reports.²⁶⁷ John Stockwell wrote that: 'The damage to its [South Africa's] white population's morale, the bitterness over the deaths of its soldiers in a secret, ill-conceived campaign in Angola, the humiliation of having two soldiers paraded before the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, were all impossible to measure'.²⁶⁸

²⁶¹ *The Guardian*, 18 December 1975. The Defence authorities refused permission to publish a transcript of their interrogation: *Rand Daily Mail*, 18 December 1975.

²⁶² *The Guardian*, 18 December 1975.

²⁶³ On 26 November the *Rand Daily Mail*'s front page lead claimed: 'terrorist suicide squads based in Zambia and Angola are responsible for a sudden escalation of skirmishes in South Africa's northern operational area. The same suicide-terror squads are also responsible for the increased number of casualties among South African troops stationed in the area.' This false story was fed to Bob Hitchcock, the defence correspondent, by a senior SADF source and was never refuted by the SADF: Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 171.

²⁶⁴ Mystery and confusion still surrounds some of the deaths. Corporal Neville Beechey was killed together with three other South Africans, on 29 October 1975, when a UNITA reconnaissance plane crashed in mysterious circumstances: P. Els, *We Fear Naught But God* (Covos-Day, Johannesburg, 2000), p. 28; Breytenbach, *Forged in Battle*, p. 95; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 105-106; Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, pp. 53-54. On an internet roll of honour for SADF members Beechey's brother has commented: 'It has been over 25 years since you were killed. We still have no information on your death, the whole family still misses you.' (Correspondence with Larry Beechey).

²⁶⁵ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 50. Spies listed 35 Defence Force casualties, 5 Portuguese and an unknown number of black casualties between 29 October 1975 and 6 March 1976: Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, Appendix A.

²⁶⁶ R. Andrew, *Buried in the Sky* (Penguin Books, London, 2001), p. 6.

²⁶⁷ The difficulties in assessing white opinion are presented in D. Baker, 'The Impact of Regional Events on Whites in Rhodesia and South Africa', (*Plural Societies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, Spring 1979); D. Baker, 'Retreat from Challenge: White Reactions to Regional Events Since 1974', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, pp. 155-180.

²⁶⁸ John Stockwell, *In Search of Enemies*, p. 232.

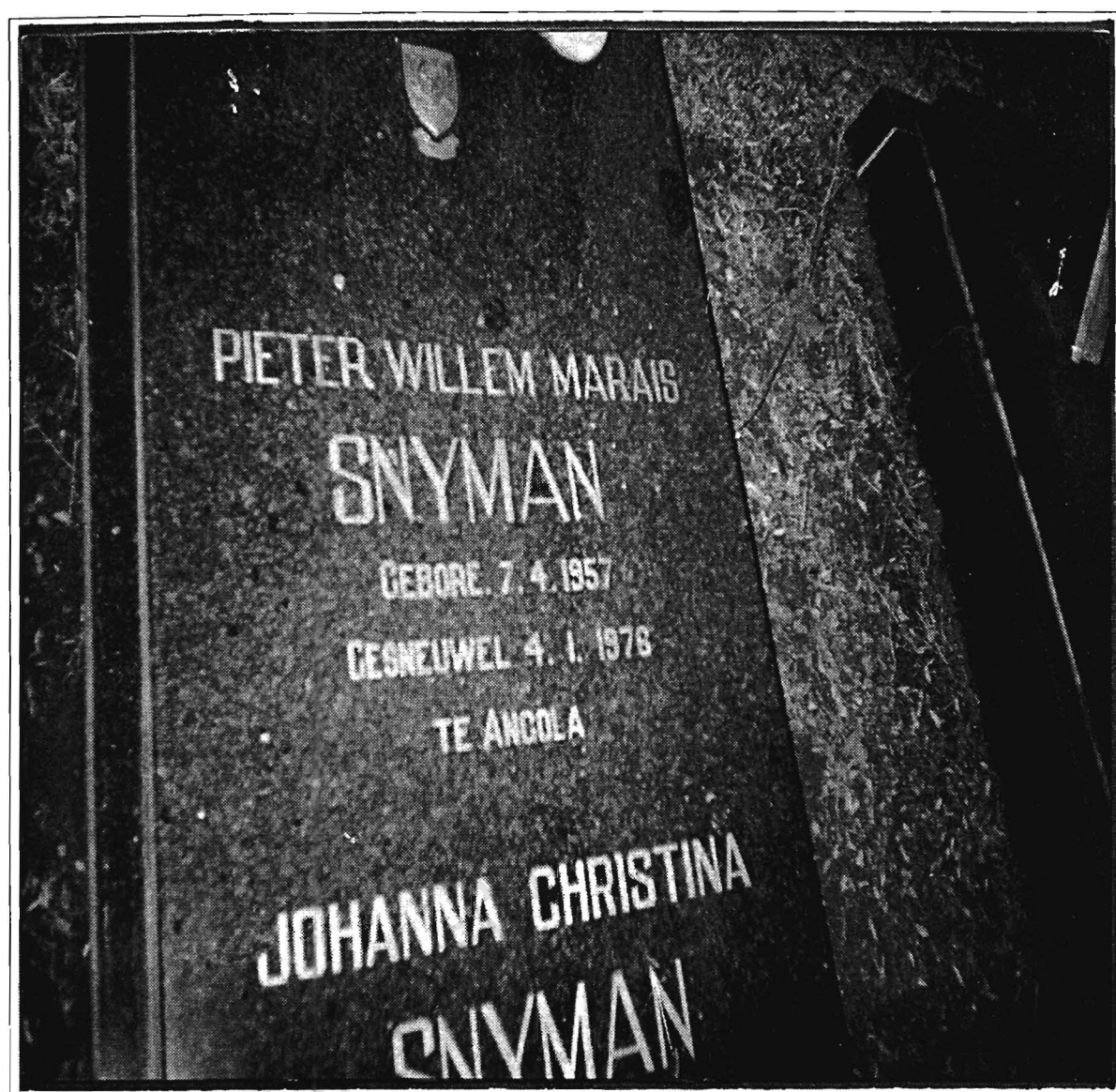


[Metrowich, F., *South Africa's New Frontiers* (Valiant, Sandton, 1977), p. 109]



[Colligan, P., *Soweto Remembered: Conversations with Freedom Fighters* (World View Publishers, New York, 1981), p. 90]

Figure 8: White South Africans were stunned and horrified to learn of the capture of four of their soldiers in Angola.



[Photograph taken by the author at Voortrekkerhoogte Military Base Cemetery, Pretoria]

Figure 9: Twenty-nine South Africans were killed in action and 14 in accidents between 14 July 1975-23 January 1976

However, Heribert Adam, an American scholar writing from Cape Town in late 1976, claimed: 'What strikes the visitor to South Africa is the very absence of a feeling of threat among Afrikaners, even after the Russia-Cuban invasion in Angola, [there is] a high degree of complacency... Pseudo-issues or false priorities, such as the information policy of the government... are hotly debated, while the real issue of South Africa's military involvement is avoided. While Defence Minister P.W. Botha admits that South Africa cannot match each Cuban weapon, the illusion of being able to march right to Lagos or at least Luanda, if necessary, is still widespread, the confidence of being able to hold the White fortress is virtually unbroken'.²⁶⁹

Public opinion polls provide one, albeit flawed, means to assess popular reaction. In May 1976, *The Star* published the conclusions of a nation-wide survey it had commissioned from a company called Market Research Africa. Of the 1,000 white South Africans questioned, 64 percent of respondents overall felt the government had been right to send troops into Angola, whilst only 18 percent disagreed (the remaining 18 percent had 'no opinion'). A larger proportion of Afrikaans-speakers (70 percent) than English-speakers (55 percent) felt the government's action had been correct, whilst a smaller proportion (14 percent as opposed to 22 percent) objected. Just over half the respondents (51 percent) felt South Africa had been right to withdraw from Angola. More Afrikaans-speakers (32 percent) than English-speakers (20 percent) felt that the troops should have been kept in Angola. Only 27 percent of those surveyed believed that Cabinet should have the right to send troops to fight in another country without first consulting Parliament (a majority of 53 percent disagreed). 46 percent of all respondents felt that the government had failed to keep the public properly informed of events in Angola (35 percent were satisfied) and 49 percent felt the South African press should not have been prevented from publishing information on Angola that had already been published abroad (33 percent did not object). *The Star* concluded that:

'Most White South Africans think the Government was right to send troops into Angola but are unhappy over the fact that this was done without Parliament being consulted. The majority also feel that South Africans were not kept properly informed on the Angolan adventure, and that the Government should not stop newspapers from printing information on Angola that has already been published or broadcast abroad'.²⁷⁰

In June and July 1977 Market and Opinion Surveys sent a postal questionnaire to a randomly selected nationwide sample of 1,352 Afrikaans-speaking whites and 946 English-speaking whites. A general question about recent events was posed in an open-ended form: 'Think about our national affairs and politics over the last three years. Which events have influenced your political thinking the most?' The 'Angola situation' emerged as the second most prominent issue after the townships revolts of 1976. Given the proposition that 'citizens have still not been adequately informed about the South African government's

²⁶⁹ Adam, 'Ideologies of Dedication', p. 89.

Angolan intervention, the reasons for it and the consequences of it', 44.1 percent of respondents agreed completely (34.7 percent of Afrikaans-speakers and 56.6 percent of English-speakers), 25.8 percent agreed partly, 22.1 percent disagreed entirely (30.1 percent of Afrikaans-speakers and 11.5 percent of English-speakers). The survey showed that while white South Africans tended to support broad propositions of a democratic kind, the likelihood of embarrassment to the government was sufficient to nullify claims to explanations of government actions (especially with regards to Afrikaans-speakers). Whilst a substantial proportion of the respondents (76.7 percent) supported the general proposition that political representatives have an obligation to account to the public for their actions during their term of office, only 35 percent agreed completely with the proposition that the press and public have a right of access to the reasons for government decisions even if the government would be embarrassed. 52.7 percent of English-speakers, but only 21.6 percent of Afrikaans-speakers, agreed completely with this proposition (42.9 percent of Afrikaans-speakers disagreed entirely, whilst only 12.1 percent of English-speakers did).²⁷¹

An election is perhaps the most authoritative measurement of white public opinion. In the general election of November 1977, Vorster won a landslide victory. The National Party secured 134 of the 165 seats in the House of Assembly, the highest proportion of parliamentary seats ever gained by a political party in South Africa.²⁷² Although Vorster had made external interference in South African affairs, especially from the United States, a key issue of the election, the Nationalists' gains were largely attributable to the electorate's approval of the severe measures that had been used to put down the Soweto uprisings.²⁷³ Seventy percent of South Africa's 1.2 million white voters had supported the National Party. At the time it was an electoral victory unparalleled in the country's history.

BLACK REACTION TO THE WAR AND THE SOWETO UPRISING

'Black Africa is riding the crest of a wave generated by the Cuban success in Angola... Black Africa is tasting the heady wine of the possibility of realising the dream of "total liberation"'.
(*The World*, Johannesburg, 24 February 1976).

The nature of apartheid society was such that it is necessary to consider the opinions of white and black South Africans separately. However, if it is difficult for one to assess the reaction of the white community to South Africa's Angolan intervention, it is harder still to examine its impact on the country's other racial

²⁷⁰ *The Star*, 12 May 1976.

²⁷¹ L. Sellemmer, 'Change in South Africa: Opportunities and Constraints', in R. Price & C. Rosberg (eds), *The Apartheid Regime: Political Power and Racial Domination* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1980), pp. 243-244; Matthews, *The Darker Reaches of Government*, pp. 198-199.

²⁷² Massie, *Loosing the Bonds*, p. 426; Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 36.

²⁷³ J. Kane-Berman, *Soweto: Black Revolt, White Reaction* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1978), pp. 154-155.

groups. Evidence from within the black community (which was far from a homogenous unit) is much harder to come by, and where available tends to be anecdotal.

As early as July 1974, *Die Burger* predicted that the imminent presence of black governments in Angola and Mozambique 'could have a particular effect on the Coloured and black people of this country who would naturally be inclined to identify themselves with those who achieve power in the Portuguese territories'.²⁷⁴ The South African government acknowledged that the demise of the Portuguese empire might encourage other liberation efforts, including those within South Africa. The 1975 *White Paper on Defence* claimed: 'Revolutionary forces regard the Portuguese developments as an important victory. In conformity with the Marxist dialectics concerning balance of power, this therefore represents to them a significant shift of the centre of gravity in their favour. This will undoubtedly encourage the radical elements in revolutionary organisations inside and outside the R.S.A. and incite them to greater efforts. They regard Angola and Moçambique as new allies and potential new operational bases for action against Rhodesia and the R.S.A'.²⁷⁵

There was clearly a level of identification between some South African blacks and the liberation movements in neighbouring countries. Nelson Mandela recalled: 'we had learned what the [prison] authorities did not want us to know. We learned of the successful liberation struggles in Mozambique and Angola in 1975 and their emergence as independent states with revolutionary governments. The tide was turning our way'.²⁷⁶ News of the establishment of a transitional government in Mozambique was greeted in Soweto with a level of enthusiasm reached before only when Albert Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.²⁷⁷ In 1974, SASO and the BPC had regorganised black public protest in South Africa, when they organised solidarity 'Viva FRELIMO' rallies in Durban and at the black University of the North in Turfloop.²⁷⁸ Their celebration of the independence of Mozambique conjured up a vision amongst young blacks of eventual political freedom in South Africa. Although banned by the police, the rally at Currie's Fountain in Durban went ahead and according to the *Black Review*, about five thousand people attended.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁴ *Die Burger*, 29 July 1974 quoted in M. Simons, 'Afrikaner Nationalist Perspectives About Change in South African Domestic Policies', in J. Seiler (ed.), *Southern Africa Since the Portuguese Coup*, p. 118.

²⁷⁵ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* 1975, p. 7.

²⁷⁶ N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Abacus, London, 1995), p. 596.

²⁷⁷ *Rand Daily Mail*, 23 September 1974.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 24 September 1974. Following the rallies the offices of SASO and BPC were raided and their leaders detained under the Terrorism Act: *Black Review* 1974-75, pp. 80-81 quoted in L. Wilson, 'Bantu Steve Biko: A Life', in N. Pityana, M. Ramphela, M. Mpumwana & L. Wilson (eds), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (David Philip, Cape Town, 1991), p. 53. The subsequent two-year trial and conviction of nine Black Consciousness organisers (seven Africans and two Indians) was in effect a judgement of the Black Consciousness philosophy: H. Mashabela, *A People on the Boil: Reflections on Soweto* (Skotaville Publishers, Braamfontein, 1987), p. 85; Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 80.

²⁷⁹ *Black Review* 1974-75, pp. 80-81 quoted in Wilson, 'Bantu Steve Biko: A Life', p. 53.

Over a thousand students attended the rally at Turfloop.²⁸⁰ The report of the Snyman Commission, which was appointed to examine the Turfloop disturbances, listed slogans that had appeared on the university campus as posters and graffiti. These included: 'Frelimo fought and regained our soil, our dignity. It is a story. Change the name and the story applies to you'; 'Viva Frelimo. Azania is bored and from this boredom a Revolution shall erupt. Down with Vorster and his Dogs! Power! We shall overcome'; 'The dignity of the Black Man has been restored in Mozambique and so shall it be here'.²⁸¹

During the war in Angola there were few public statements by prominent blacks in support of the MPLA, and a seeming reluctance to discuss the issue in print. The most notable exception was the Black Peoples' Convention (BPC), one of the principal organisations of the Black Consciousness movement in South Africa.²⁸² The movement had been born into the vacuum left by the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress and the central theme of its philosophy was black psychological liberation and self-assertion.²⁸³ At its Fourth Annual Congress in December 1975, at the height of the Angolan war, the BPC openly announced its recognition of the MPLA as the legitimate government of Angola.²⁸⁴ Steve Biko told Donald Woods that the Black Consciousness movement as a whole supported Neto but predicted that the MPLA's use of Cuban troops to counter the South African invasion would lead the West to call Neto a puppet of the Communist powers.²⁸⁵

Some conservative black leaders did make statements but most were oblique because they could not be seen to support a movement or government that the authorities condemned as Marxist. In a speech to a mass rally in Soweto on 14 March 1976, Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi, chief minister of the KwaZulu homeland government and president of Inkatha, avoided mentioning the MPLA but claimed: 'The Prime Minister's détente policy has not succeeded. Not only has it not succeeded, but white South Africa has burnt her fingers in Angola. There was a scream of applause throughout South Africa, and outside, when South African troops were withdrawn from Zimbabwe. But we have seen in a matter of months that score erased by South Africa herself, through her Angolan connection.' He continued: 'The pace of events and the struggle for liberation in Southern Africa is gaining momentum... every hour of the day, the time is

²⁸⁰ J. Wolfson (ed.), *Turfloop: A Summary of the Reports of the Snyman and Jackson Commissions of Inquiry into the University of the North* (South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1976), pp. 1, 3, 30.

²⁸¹ Wolfson (ed.), *Turfloop*, p. 28.

²⁸² The movement was spearhead by the South African Students' Organisation (SASO), encompassing African, coloured, and Indian university students, which had been established as a break-away from the multi-racial but white-dominated National Union of South African Students in 1969. With Steve Biko as its first president, SASO had been instrumental in the 1972 formation of the BPC, which aimed to expand the Black Consciousness philosophy to a broader adult constituency. Mashabela, *A People on the Boil*, pp. 10, 12, 101; Wilson, 'Bantu Steve Biko: A Life', p. 52.

²⁸³ Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, p. 107.

²⁸⁴ *The Times*, 23 December 1975.

²⁸⁵ Woods, *Asking for Trouble*, p. 254.

drawing nearer, when we will see White South Africa's enemies encamped on South Africa's border.'²⁸⁶ *The Star* reported that Buthelezi's speech had been enthusiastically received by ten thousand Sowetans shouting, 'Power is ours'. Dr Andries Treurnicht, the new junior Minister of Bantu Administration and Education, warned that Buthelezi was 'preaching revolution' and that 'this sort of talk is very dangerous for South Africa'.²⁸⁷

In an article entitled 'S. African Role Upsets Its Blacks', Denis Herbstein reported the reactions of several other black leaders to the South African invasion. Bishop Desmond Tutu, Anglican Dean of Johannesburg, pointed out that South Africa's disenfranchised blacks were not mesmerised by the spectre of a communist threat²⁸⁸: 'many Blacks do not see themselves threatened as they are victims of other ideologies in South Africa.' The Chief Minister of Gazankulu, Hudson Ntsanwisi, had said: 'People are saying "The devil we don't know cannot be worse than the devil we now know"', and noted that: 'Our restless youth is espousing the cause of the MPLA.' Another homeland chief, Cedric Phatudi of Lebowa, had called the South African intervention 'a mistake' and stressed: 'If the blacks don't have a stake in the country, they cannot give it their full loyalty.'²⁸⁹ Herbstein believed that the main internal aim of the government's censorship was to keep the black population, specifically, in ignorance of the war: 'It is dangerous for a country to fight a war when five sixths of the population are either neutral or rooting for the enemy'.²⁹⁰

Whilst the government called for national solidarity in the face of 'communist imperialism' threatening blacks and whites alike, the Angolan war called into question the issue of where the loyalties of South Africa's blacks would lie if South Africa were to face an external threat. Buthelezi stated that, 'The majority of blacks will not find it in their hearts to die on the country's borders to defend a system which is to them morally repugnant, a system which dehumanises them and which mocks God Almighty for creating us blacks also in his image.'²⁹¹ Sonny Leon, leader of the coloured Labour Party, declared: 'I will never tell

²⁸⁶ M. Buthelezi, *Power is Ours: Selected Speeches of South African Statesman M. Gatsha Buthelezi, Buthelezi Speaks on the Crisis in South Africa* (Books in Focus, New York, 1979), p. 24; Buthelezi, 'A message to South Africa from black South Africa', printed as a supplement to *Pro Veritate*, March 1976 and quoted in B. Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?* (Zed Press, London, 1979), pp. 168-169.

²⁸⁷ *The Star*, 20 March 1976.

²⁸⁸ However, the Indian community may have been more susceptible to government propaganda about the threat of communism having seen anti-Asian and anti-Arab activities in Zanzibar and President Amin of Uganda's railing against Indians as 'capitalist exploiters': K. Moodley, 'Structural Inequality and Minority Anxiety: Responses of Middle Groups in South Africa', in R. Price & C. Rosberg (eds), *The Apartheid Regime*, p. 233.

²⁸⁹ *Washington Post*, 24 January 1976 quoted in Legum, *Vorster's Gamble for Africa*, p. 45. See also *The Guardian*, 24 January 1976.

²⁹⁰ Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 130.

²⁹¹ Buthelezi, *Power is Ours*, p. 27.

my people to fight for the perpetuation of white *baasskap*. It would be unfair to expect Coloured soldiers to risk their lives for their country when they are still being treated as second-class citizens.’²⁹²

As the Defence Force withdrew from Angola, *The World*, South Africa’s main black newspaper, asked its readers: ‘Would you fight for South Africa if we are invaded from Angola?’ Some 244 letters were received in reply, 203 of which said they were opposed to fighting in defence of South Africa. The most common reason given was that it would be a white man’s war in which most blacks would have little to defend. Some recalled the Second World War and the bonuses given to white veterans while ‘worthless medals’ were offered to blacks. One Soweto resident commented wryly: ‘I’m a Bantu homeland citizen, so I’d be indulging myself in foreign politics – South Africa’s.’ Another asked, ‘How can a black man be expected to fight with the *dompas* [pass book] in his pocket, because if he leaves it at home he will be arrested?’ However, some who opposed fighting said they would change their minds if the pass laws were abolished or if their economic conditions were improved.²⁹³

Black public opinion is harder to gauge than the reaction of politicians or the black press. On 22 February 1976, the South African *Sunday Times* ran a series of articles detailing black reactions to the war in Angola. Howard Lawrence reported that in coloured bars in Cape Town ‘when South African soldiers appear on the [television] screen, the coloured customers hiss’, but ‘when scenes are shown of MPLA or Cuban soldiers, there are shouts of exultation’.²⁹⁴ Lawrence also noted that ‘in the townships, at the lowest socio-economic level, gang names are changing from the “Panorama Kids” and “Naughty Boys” to “Cuban Kids” and “MPLA Terrors”’.²⁹⁵ In late February 1976, a SWAPO fighter being interviewed in Luanda claimed: ‘Our friends [in South Africa] report on black reactions to documentaries on the Angolan war in cinemas. Enthusiastic applause when MPLA victories are portrayed, dead silence on anything favourable to the South Africans.’²⁹⁶

²⁹² K. Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics: Blacks in the South African Armed Forces* (University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1983), p. 222. Evidence of the fact that the Defence Force was seen by blacks as the defender of white interests was that, during the 1976 Soweto uprising, the families of black soldiers in 21 Battalion were moved out of Soweto and into a military camp for their own protection.

²⁹³ Quoted in *The Star*, 13 March 1976. See also, Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 131.

²⁹⁴ Similarly an eye-witness described to the authors of *Southern Africa after Soweto*, how in Cape Town huge black audiences would watch the television news in Coloured hotels and cheer every report of South African casualties in the ‘operational zone’: Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, p. 157.

²⁹⁵ *Sunday Times*, 22 February 1976. However, it may be that such names were intended to offend ‘middle-class’ black opinion as much as white sensibilities. In his work on Sowetan gangs, Clive Glaser has described their propensity to select names specifically for their offensive value: C. Glaser, ‘Swines, Hazels and the Dirty Dozen: Masculinity, Territoriality and the Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1960-1976’, (*Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 1998), p. 726 and *Bo Tsotsi: The Youth Gangs of Soweto, 1935-1976* (James Currey, Oxford, 2000), pp. 70, 135-136. Nor is it clear whether members of the ‘MPLA Terrors’ felt any political affiliation with their namesake. However, Glaser believes that the introduction of television, in January 1976, did see the beginning of political awareness within gangs: (Correspondence with Clive Glaser).

In mid-1976, a 'leading ANC cadre' who had been in Johannesburg at the time of South Africa's intervention, said he believed: 'It was the defeat of Vorster's troops in Angola which completely transformed people's thinking, especially the young people whom our traditional organisations had not been able to reach until now.'²⁹⁷ Writing in the *Rand Daily Mail*, Roger Sargent claimed: 'In Angola Black troops – Cubans and Angolans – have defeated White troops in military exchanges. Whether the bulk of the offensive was by Cubans or Angolans is immaterial in the colour-conscious context of this war's battlefield, for the reality is that they won, are winning, and are not White; and that psychological edge, that advantage the White man has enjoyed and exploited over 300 years of colonialism and empire, is slipping away. White elitism has suffered an irreversible blow in Angola and Whites who have been there know it'.²⁹⁸ The *New York Times* quoted the principal of a black high school in Soweto as saying that Angola 'was very much on the minds of his 700 students...it gives them hope.' Similarly a young black man in Soweto had mused: 'It makes us all think. In Rhodesia they are talking and after 10 years they have nothing. In Angola and Mozambique they fought, and they have won.'²⁹⁹

Representatives of both the United Party and the Progressive Reform Party foresaw the possible impact that Angola could have on South Africa's blacks. Dr G.F. Jacobs of the United Party predicted: 'We must expect a hardening of the attitudes of our own Non-Whites.'³⁰⁰ He believed that the 'imperative lesson we learnt from Angola is that we will not survive unless we can have the loyalty of all South Africans.'³⁰¹ Similarly his leader, Sir De Villiers Graaff, claimed: 'unless things change in South Africa there are going to be many people of the non-White races in South Africa who are going to be less afraid of communism than they are of the present deal they are getting in South Africa.'³⁰² Colin Eglon of the PRP was more specific in claiming that: 'many black people see what is happening in the north and in Angola as part of the process of their liberation from discrimination and domination within South Africa...Just as many of them cheered the Frelimo victories in Mozambique, so I believe that many of the Black people of South Africa are getting a silent satisfaction out of the successes of the MPLA.'³⁰³ Helen Suzman stressed: 'You can give our men at the border the most modern, sophisticated weapons and they will be as effective as bows and arrows if behind them, inside South Africa, there is a growing ground-swell of discontent amongst 80 percent of the population.'³⁰⁴

²⁹⁶ Homateni Kaluenja quoted in Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 293.

²⁹⁷ Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 246.

²⁹⁸ *Rand Daily Mail*, 13 February 1976.

²⁹⁹ *New York Times*, 21 February 1976.

³⁰⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 28 February 1976.

³⁰¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col.80.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 30 January 1976, col. 383.

³⁰³ *Ibid*, 16 February 1976, col. 1274.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 29 January 1976, col. 342.

OPERATION SAVANNAH AND THE SOWETO UPRISING

'It happened in Angola. Why not here?'
(Placard displayed in Soweto on 16 June)³⁰⁵

On 16 June 1976 black schoolchildren in Soweto protested against the government's introduction of compulsory Afrikaans-language instruction in their schools. The unrest and its brutal suppression sparked angry protests throughout the country, the first widespread black collective action since the early 1960s. 'Soweto' came to represent the whole of the disturbances, which included strikes in the Cape that were joined by Coloured workers. In *Soweto Remembered: Conversations with Freedom Fighters*, Paddy Colligan interviewed David Ndaba, a student activist who had left South Africa after Soweto and joined the ANC in exile. Ndaba claimed: 'The defeat of the South African troops that invaded Angola in 1975 and in 1976 is one of the elements that inspired our popular uprisings of 1976.'³⁰⁶

In 1977, R.W. Johnson claimed: 'The Angolan débâcle was, for South Africa's White Establishment, an appallingly comprehensive disaster. The triumph, first of FRELIMO and then of the MPLA, contributed powerfully to the new and assertive mood of the Republic's black population'. Johnson believed that in the 'psychological impact of Angola', together with the deteriorating economic situation, lay the root cause of the black-white confrontations of 1976.³⁰⁷ John Kane-Berman, a liberal South African journalist who published the first academic analysis of Soweto, claimed the single most important factor leading to the volatility of the South African townships was the influence of Black Consciousness ideology. He judged that: 'The liberation of Mozambique and Angola and the guerrilla wars being waged in Namibia and Rhodesia are likely to have had an impact on a fairly wide cross-section of blacks, firing them with the expectation of major change. Moreover, to the extent that black South Africans saw the withdrawal of South African military forces from Angola as a sign that white power was not invincible, this too would have had an important psychological impact'.³⁰⁸ Also published in 1978, *Southern Africa after Soweto* by Alex Callinicos and John Rogers claimed that 'the Angolan debacle provided the catalyst to the revolt'. They believed that the MPLA's victory over the South African regime's troops together with FRELIMO's victory in Mozambique 'helped to instil in black South Africans the confidence that their white rulers could be taken on and beaten'.³⁰⁹

Denis Herbstein pointed out that although the Defence Force had claimed its withdrawal had been for political rather than military reasons, it could not control the public's perception of events: 'The black

³⁰⁵ Republic of South Africa (Justice Petrus Malan Cillie), *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto and Elsewhere from the 16th of June 1976 to the 28th of February 1977* (RP 55/1980, Government Printer, Pretoria, 1980), p. 580.

³⁰⁶ Colligan, *Soweto Remembered*, pp. 17-18.

³⁰⁷ Johnson, *How Long Will South Africa Survive?*, pp. 172-173.

³⁰⁸ Kane-Berman, *Soweto*, pp. 48, 106.

people of South Africa, rightly or wrongly, believed that their white soldiers had been given a bloody nose by the black Angolans'. Consequently, 'A small chink had appeared in the monolithic armour of the country's defence system. Coming so soon after the victory of the Frelimo 'terrorists', this had an incalculable impact on urban blacks'.³¹⁰ In *Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution?*, Baruch Hirson claimed the reassertion of black working-class militancy as evidenced by the wave of strikes in 1973 overshadowed Black Consciousness in contributing to the ideological climate of rebellion but claimed that 'the army's venture into Angola was the dominant factor that changed the mood of the black townships'.³¹¹ Also writing from within the community of exiled South African activists, A. Brooks and J. Brickhill placed the emphasis of their analysis on the changes in the educational system. However, they recognised: 'Throughout their formative years, there were few events with which the young people could identify and from which they drew encouragement, but those there were gave them hope and determination... Within South Africa there were the Natal strikes by black workers in 1973 and, above all, the defeat of South African troops in Angola in 1975-76, showing that the white army was not invincible'.³¹²

On 24 June 1976, Justice P.M. Cillié was appointed as the chairman and sole member of a Government Commission of Enquiry into the events of Soweto. Chapter 5 of his report, entitled 'Political and Military Developments Outside the RSA', considered whether developments in southern Africa had contributed to the outbreak of the 'riots'. Cillié posed the question of 'whether the Black man in the RSA did not regard the Black man who had fought for freedom in other parts of Southern Africa as an ally in the struggle against the White oppressor and whether that idea did not contribute to the outbreak of the riots'.³¹³ The evidence Cillié considered included pamphlets issued by the African National Congress detailing the success of liberation movements in neighbouring countries and the international support those movements had received. Cillié stated that it was not known how many of the 'rioters' read the pamphlets but concluded that some of their leaders must have been aware of their contents.³¹⁴

One ANC pamphlet, entitled 'South Africa Get Out of Angola', was issued on 10 December 1975. It described how the 'patriotic forces' in Angola had achieved victory with Soviet, Russian, Vietnamese and Cuban assistance. It stressed that all the peoples of southern Africa were fighting the same fight and that revolution had reached the borders of South Africa. A second pamphlet distributed by the ANC on 8 March 1976 was headed: 'Don't collaborate with the racist intervention in Angola'. A further pamphlet issued in

³⁰⁹ Callinicos & Rogers, *Southern Africa after Soweto*, pp. 8, 157-158.

³¹⁰ Herbstein, *White Man*, p. 134.

³¹¹ Hirson, *Year of Fire, Year of Ash*, p. 167.

³¹² A. Brooks & J. Brickhill, *Whirlwind Before the Storm: The origins and development of the uprising in Soweto and the rest of South Africa from June to December 1976* (International Defence and Aid Fund, London, 1980), p. 68.

³¹³ Republic of South Africa, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Riots at Soweto*, p. 578.

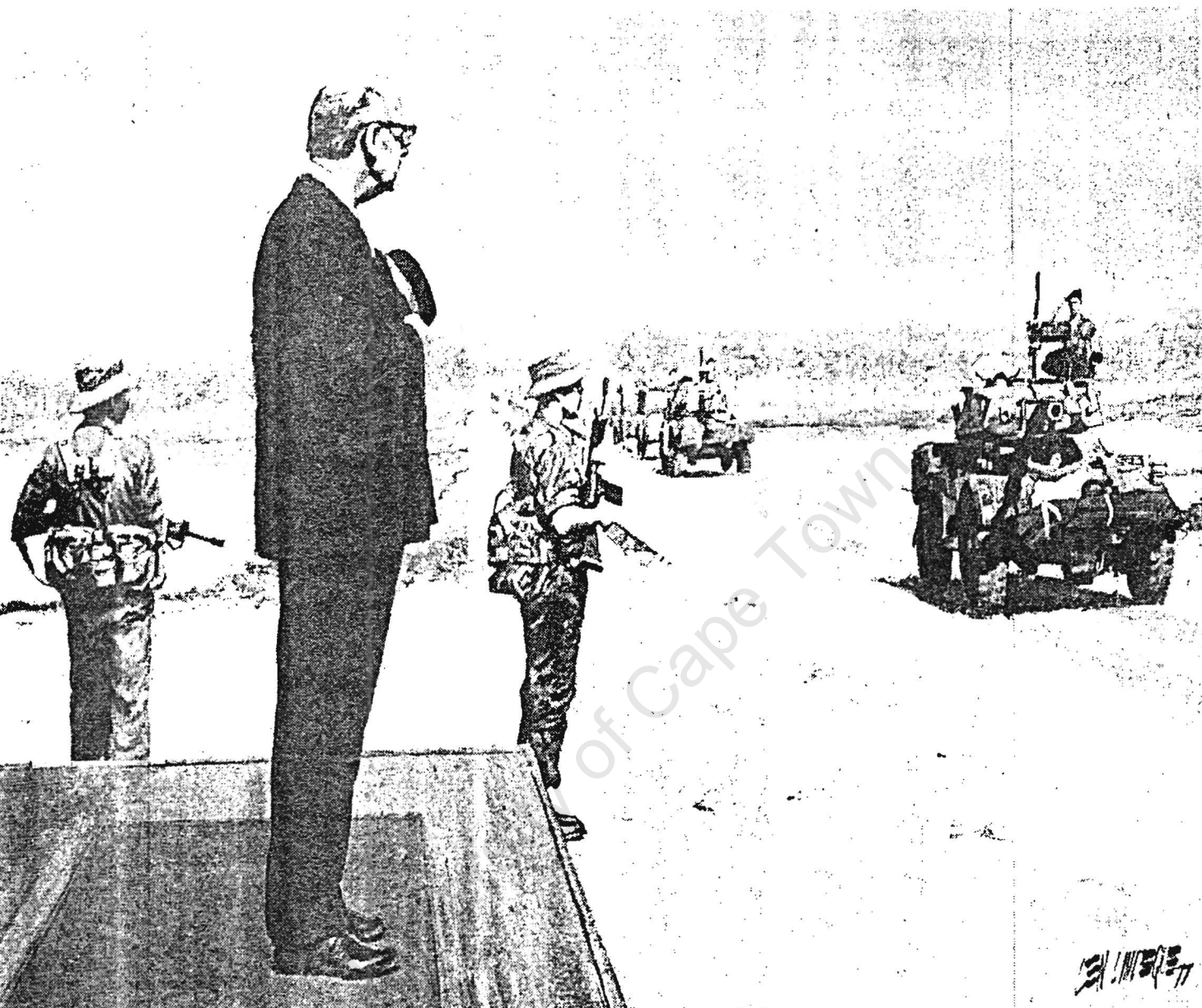
³¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 580.

March and May 1976 claimed that the lesson of Angola was that there was nothing that could stop the flames of freedom spreading throughout southern Africa. According to a pamphlet issued in June 1976, FRELIMO and the MPLA had shown that the South African Army was not invincible. A pamphlet distributed in December 1976 claimed: 'These racist murderers who slaughter unarmed children and women fled in panic when they came face to face with the armed freedom fighters of Umkhonto in Zimbabwe in 1967 and 1968. Their racist arrogance shrank when our MPLA comrades thrashed them in Angola. And now the time is coming when Umkhonto will punish the racists on our soil'.³¹⁵

Cillié's finding was that 'Although political and military events in Southern Africa were not a direct cause of the riots and disturbances, they were undoubtedly a factor which, together with many others, helped to create a state of mind in which rebelliousness could easily be stirred up'.³¹⁶

³¹⁵ Ibid, p. 579.

³¹⁶ Ibid, p. 580.



[Painting by Len Lindeque reproduced in *Paratus*, April 1978]

Figure 10: On 27 March 1976, Botha stood on a dais at Ruacana and took the salute as the last South African troops crossed over the Cunene River and back into Namibia.

THE SECURITY SITUATION AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEFENCE FORCE

‘Whatever the Government’s intentions may have been, we believe that they have committed an error of judgement in this matter. It has not resolved the Angolan issue. The MPLA is still there. The Russians are still there. The Cubans are still there... in the space of three months we have moved from an era of peaceful, albeit strained, co-existence into a new era of militarism in which the effective defence of South Africa...becomes a new and immediate factor.’

(Colin Eglin, *House of Assembly Debates*, 27 January 1976)³¹⁷

On 22 January 1976, the Defence Force began its withdrawal from Angola. By the end of the month it had pulled back to a 50 kilometre-wide buffer zone inside the Angolan border.³¹⁸ In mid-February the *Sunday Times* reported: ‘The speed of MPLA’s advance has taken everyone by surprise. It is now less than 150 miles from the South African troops, who are stationed up to 30 miles from the Namibian border. It could be only a matter of days before the Cubans bump up against the South Africans’.³¹⁹ However, as the MPLA and Cuban forces advanced into the areas vacated by the South Africans both sides behaved with considerable circumspection.³²⁰ On 27 March 1976, Botha stood on a dais at Ruacana and took the salute as the last South African troops crossed over the Cunene River and back into Namibia.³²¹ In subsequent years the date was marked in Angola by a Carnival of Victory - victory in what the MPLA termed the ‘Second War of National Liberation’.³²²

THE COMMUNIST PRESENCE IN ANGOLA

‘We went to confront a potential enemy in Angola and because of that confrontation we may expect to meet with a real enemy today. In other words, this Government precipitated this problem for South Africa.’

(H.E.J. van Rensburg, Progressive Reform Party, 28 January 1976)³²³

By the start of April, MPLA-Cuban forces were at the Namibian border. At the end of the month, Botha claimed that there were between 12,000 and 15,000 Cuban troops in Angola.³²⁴ South Africa’s intervention

³¹⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 27 January 1976, cols. 106-107.

³¹⁸ *Washington Post*, 3 February 1976. The buffer-zone was occupied by between 4,000-5,000 troops. Citizen Force units were called up to allow the discharge of the National Servicemen who had reached the end of their service period.

³¹⁹ *Sunday Times*, 15 February 1976.

³²⁰ Hallett, ‘The South African Intervention in Angola’, p. 384. Moss claimed that the MPLA sent spotter planes ahead to check for any signs of remaining South African forces: *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977.

³²¹ *Le Monde*, 30 March 1976. With Britain, Russia and Nigeria acting as intermediaries, the South African government had received assurances from Luanda that work on the Cunene scheme would not be interfered with: Hallett, ‘The South African Intervention in Angola’, p. 384.

³²² Minter, *Apartheid’s Contras*, p. 21.

³²³ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 28 January 1976, col. 297.

had helped bring about the security situation most feared by successive National Party governments, a strong communist military presence on South Africa's borders. Vorster claimed that South Africa had 'done the free world a service' in 'exposing' the Russian-Cuban involvement in Angola.³²⁵ However, it could be argued that through its own intervention, South Africa had forced Cuba to build up a truly massive military presence. Had South Africa not become involved, Cuba and the Soviet Union might well have followed a different policy in Angola, at least with regard to the extent of their own military involvement.³²⁶ South Africa's intervention certainly served to legitimate Soviet and Cuban involvement in the eyes of many African states. Pretoria had underestimated the convulsive effect its own entanglement would have, so allowing Cuba and the Soviet Union to invoke the spectre of the conquest of Angola by white supremacists. Japie Basson of the United Party told Parliament, 'The Cubans are now the people who are regarded as heroes in the Black world.'³²⁷

The fear in Pretoria was that the Soviet and Cuban posture in Angola, large-scale support for a selected insurgency movement, was a harbinger of their future regional policy. The intervention of Cuban troops in Angola concentrated Pretoria's attentions on the possibility of a conventional war along South Africa's own borders.³²⁸ The continuing Cuban presence in Angola presented the threat of an attack against Namibia, Rhodesia or South Africa itself. Robert Moss predicted: 'What the Russians learned from Angola is that war by proxy pays off. They will be strongly tempted to use the same technique in other places – and almost certainly in the assault on Rhodesia and South-West Africa'.³²⁹ When the Director General of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation visited Pretoria on 16-17 March 1976, his discussion with General Van den Bergh revolved around 'the Cuban invasion threat': 'We discussed at length the South African Military assessment of Cuban plans to attack Rhodesia...'³³⁰

The United Party claimed in Parliament that: 'Angola has been a traumatic experience of immense consequence. It has jolted the national conscience to an extent that no single event has done for the last 20 years. This is so because for years we thought we had time... For years we thought that Russia was 7,000 miles away. Now Russia is, as it were, in our back garden. This brings about a completely different

³²⁴ Ibid, 26 April 1976, col. 5398. Most estimates suggest that Cuban forces reached 12,000-13,000 by early 1976: *Le Monde*, 11 January 1977. The Cubans were joined by symbolic contingents from Guinea-Bissau and Guinea (the soldiers from Conakry arrived in early March too late to participate in the fighting). There were false rumours about the presence of contingents from Mozambique, Algeria and Czechoslovakia: Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions*, pp. 343, 498 fn.72.

³²⁵ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 30 January 1976, col. 365.

³²⁶ S. Nolutshungu, 'South African Policy and United States Options in Southern Africa', in G. Bender, J. Coleman & R. Sklar (eds), *African Crisis Areas and U.S. Foreign Policy* (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985), p. 51.

³²⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 9 April 1976, col. 4934.

³²⁸ Coker, *South Africa's Security Dilemmas*, p. 26.

³²⁹ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 20 February 1977.

³³⁰ K. Flower, *Serving Secretly: Rhodesia's CIO on Record* (Galago, Alberton, South Africa, 1987), p. 156.

situation to which we will have to react.³³¹ The danger of the 'Red impis' became the new refrain. Marais Viljoen, the Minister of Labour, claimed: 'As South Africa's existence was threatened by Dingaan's impis 137 years ago, so the existence of the Republic and its neighbours is now threatened by the imperialist impis of Moscow'.³³² In light of Angola, concern was expressed within South Africa that when the Transkei and other Bantustans were given 'independence' by South Africa they could become springboards for Soviet military aggression against the Republic. An article in the *South African Yearbook of International Law* stressed South Africa's need for 'collective regional defence' against communist intervention and suggested a treaty of mutual self-defence with the future independent homelands.³³³

The Angolan war had certainly introduced the Soviet Union as a major diplomatic factor in the affairs of southern Africa.³³⁴ The Soviet Union had demonstrated its willingness and capability to provide effective military support for a liberation movement in southern Africa.³³⁵ Consequently Moscow made some immediate diplomatic gains with black governments in the region. In early 1976 it was reported that Angola and the Soviet Union had concluded a twenty-year treaty of 'friendship and cooperation',³³⁶ which was followed in October by an agreement formalising closer political and commercial ties.³³⁷ The most dramatic change occurred in relations with Mozambique where the Soviets soon eclipsed the Chinese in influence. Mozambique feared that the Rhodesian conflict would develop into a conventional war and the Soviets, in contrast to the Chinese, had brought from Angola the reputation of being a reliable ally. The February 1977 FRELIMO party conference extended a welcome to delegations from the Soviet Union, Cuba and several Eastern European countries, but not from China. Improved Soviet relations with African countries was symbolised by President Podgorny's March 1977 tour of Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. Whilst in Mozambique he signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation similar to those already concluded with Somalia and Angola.³³⁸ South Africa's *White Paper on Defence* for 1977 predicted: 'The impact of events in Angola on the RSA's security interests...will probably have far-reaching consequences in the long run...there is a Soviet shadow over parts of Africa'.³³⁹

³³¹ Dr G.F. Jacobs, Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 78.

³³² *Cape Times*, 17 December 1975.

³³³ G. Stephan & H. Booysen, 'The Angolan Conflict: Its Relevance for South Africa in her Relations with Future Independent Bantustans and the Need for a Monroe Doctrine', (*South African Yearbook of International Law* 1975, Vol. 1, 1976), pp. 104, 113-114.

³³⁴ R. Price, *The Apartheid State in Crisis: Political Transformation in South Africa 1975-1990* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1991), p. 41.

³³⁵ Legum, 'The Soviet Union, China and the West', p. 753.

³³⁶ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa* 1976, p. 432.

³³⁷ J. Erickson, 'The Shaping of Soviet Global Strategy', in M. Louw (ed.), *National Security: A Modern Approach - Papers presented at the Symposium on National Security held at Pretoria, 31 March-1 April 1977* (Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 1978), p. 159.

³³⁸ Stevens, 'The Soviet Role in Southern Africa', p. 51.

³³⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence* 1977, p. 6.

Speaking in February 1976, Vorster foresaw new dangers ahead. He warned that the Russians and Cubans in Angola were testing to see how far the Free World would let them proceed. He stressed that 'the possibility exists that South Africa will have to meet an onslaught not only from within but also from without...'³⁴⁰ In March 1976, the Minister of Finance claimed: 'Political developments in Southern Africa...clearly demand that we increase our defence effort and strengthen our economic and military preparedness.'³⁴¹ Following the war an interdepartmental committee was appointed to consider urgently 'the formulation of strategy on the national level' and the organisational structures required for the purpose.³⁴² In light of Angola, it was felt that Western support for South Africa could no longer be relied upon in a future armed confrontation.³⁴³ Diplomatically isolated and territorially threatened, the government perceived itself to be besieged by a 'total onslaught', directed by Moscow and waged at different levels. It was assumed that Pretoria's security dilemma was not attributable to legitimate black demands for political and economic participation, but to manipulations by forces from outside the region.³⁴⁴ The 'external threat', rather than the policy of apartheid was seen by Pretoria as the precipitant of South Africa's internal problems.³⁴⁵ The perceived threat on South Africa's borders was thus linked to its internal security.³⁴⁶ In his New Years speech Vorster commented: 'We have lost men – good men and brave men – I salute them, and I pray that their families will find comfort in the thought that they died so that men, women and children could live free of the yoke of atheist communist enslavement.'³⁴⁷

The 1977 *White Paper on Defence* was largely devoted to an exposition of the concept of a 'total national strategy' that was required to counter this 'total onslaught'. 'Total strategy' was 'total' because it did away with the previous distinctions between military and civilian, peacetime and wartime. It was to involve all the means available to the state: military, economic, psychological, political, sociological, diplomatic, cultural and ideological. Although the themes of total onslaught and total strategy had predated the intervention of South Africa in Angola, specifically in the 1973 and 1975 *White Papers on Defence*, they

³⁴⁰ *The Star*, 21 February 1976.

³⁴¹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 31 March 1976, col. 4234.

³⁴² Speech by General Magnus Malan to the Institute for Strategic Studies, University of Pretoria, 3 September 1980, quoted in Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 93.

³⁴³ S. Nolutshungu, *Changing South Africa: Political Considerations* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1982), p. 78.

³⁴⁴ T. Callaghy, 'Apartheid and Socialism: South Africa's Relations with Angola and Mozambique', in T. Callaghy (ed.), *South Africa in Southern Africa: The Intensifying Vortex of Violence* (Praeger, New York, 1983), p. 268.

³⁴⁵ C. Legum, *The Battlefronts of Southern Africa* (Africana Publishing Company, New York, 1988), p. xv.

³⁴⁶ For example see S. Menaul, *The Border Wars: South Africa's Response* (Conflict Studies No. 152, Institute for the Study of Conflict, London, 1983), p. 1: 'Today South Africa is defending its frontiers from external attack and subduing internal subversion inspired by Soviet intervention. The main threats are to its northern and eastern borders, emanating from Angola and Mozambique which have adopted Marxist/Leninist doctrine and ideology under pressure from the Soviet Union and her Cuban and East German surrogates'.

³⁴⁷ Vorster's New Years speech 1976, quoted in *South African Digest*, 16 January 1976, p. 1.

were little more than slogans.³⁴⁸ It was only after Angola, the uprisings in Soweto and Botha's assumption of power that the concept of managing the country's security on an integrated basis became operational.³⁴⁹ A heavy emphasis on South Africa's security in a hostile environment was an important feature of Botha's administration. The 'total strategy' was characterised by a near wartime level of resource mobilisation. It was described by one American military analyst as 'the most sophisticated development of low-intensity conflict doctrine in the world today'.³⁵⁰ The total onslaught greatly overstated the danger of the external environment in which the country found itself. Its antidote of total strategy was a quest for security and an affirmation of political power in a world in which South Africa found itself isolated.³⁵¹

ESCALATION IN SWAPO ACTIVITY

'The SWAPO incursions took a new turn. Many military observers consider 27 March 1976 to be the date on which the insurgency war really started in all seriousness. SWAPO was now potentially in a stronger military position than before.'
(Jannie Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, pp. 58-59).

The period of South Africa's intervention in Angola had seen an obvious increased SWAPO presence along the Angolan-Namibian border. Although the SADF claimed that its involvement in Angola was partly motivated by the need to counter SWAPO terrorism, in fact PLAN military activities in the Ovambo region of Namibia intensified. David Phillips 'Ho Chi Minh' Namholo, PLAN's Chief of Staff (and later Chief of Staff of the Namibian Defence Force), explained that while South Africa was striking into Angola, PLAN had been able to operate almost with impunity in the area near the border ('shallow Angola').³⁵² Limitations placed on SWAPO by the Zambian government, as a result of Vorster's détente initiative, also necessitated the opening of the Ovambo and Kavango fronts.³⁵³ In October 1975, SWAPO was reported to have established several training camps in Angola.³⁵⁴ On 13 October, the SADF announced that SWAPO guerrillas from Angola had raided two Namibian villages near Oshikango, murdering a deputy headman and his wife and seven tribal policemen.³⁵⁵ In December 1975, the new Ovambo Chief Minister, Cornelius Njoba, said that insurgents had been seen as far into Namibia as Ondangua and Oshakati, some 60 kilometres from Angola.³⁵⁶ Just before Christmas a white woman and child were killed near Grootfontein,

³⁴⁸ S. Metz, 'Pretoria's "Total Strategy" and Low-Intensity Warfare in Southern Africa', (*Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1987), p. 437.

³⁴⁹ H. Campbell, 'The Military Defeat of the South Africans in Angola', (*Monthly Review*, New York, April 1989, Vol. 40, No. 1), p. 8.

³⁵⁰ Metz, 'Pretoria's "Total Strategy"', p. 437.

³⁵¹ Coker, *South Africa's Security Dilemmas*, p. 2.

³⁵² Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', p. 25.

³⁵³ Ibid, p. 24.

³⁵⁴ *Daily Telegraph*, 15 October 1975.

³⁵⁵ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1975*, p. 350.

³⁵⁶ *Cape Times*, 17 December 1975.

and the subsequent uproar prompted the South African Minister of Justice to personally supervise the search for the guerrillas responsible.³⁵⁷

Following the Defence Force's withdrawal from Angola, South Africa was more vulnerable to PLAN forces than ever before. The government was now confronted by an antagonistic counterpart in Luanda that was supportive of the liberation movements in Namibia, Rhodesia and South Africa itself. SWAPO acquired a militant ally in the MPLA regime. It was reported that Sam Nujoma was 'overjoyed with the quality of the support SWAPO was already getting from the MPLA even when South African troops were still occupying the Angola-Namibia frontier areas.'³⁵⁸ SWAPO had a new base-country from which to operate and PLAN's headquarters were transferred to Angola in 1976. Willem Steenkamp claimed: 'The most important consequence of the American-South African failure [to prevent an MPLA victory in Angola] was that for the first time SWAPO acquired an asset generally held to be essential for a successful insurgency: a safe border over which it could operate and behind which it could seek sanctuary and general support'.³⁵⁹

The MPLA government allowed SWAPO to establish a network of training camps and bases in southern Angola, from which they stepped up their incursions into Namibia.³⁶⁰ No less important to SWAPO was the military presence in Angola of the Soviet-assisted Cubans, which offered the SWAPO leadership a new source of assistance.³⁶¹ Backed by the MPLA's logistical system, SWAPO was able to access and distribute Soviet supplies more successfully.³⁶² In February 1976, even the pro-Nationalist newspaper *Die Vaderland* judged: 'The decision of Jonas Savimbi, leader of UNITA, to ask in Pretoria last year for assistance, may still have a disastrous result for South West [Africa] because it drove SWAPO into the arms of Russia'.³⁶³ There is also the possibility that, like South African blacks, SWAPO drew psychological strength from the SADF's apparent defeat in Angola. Interviewed in December 1980 Ellen Nomsa Musialela, a SWAPO activist living in exile in Luanda claimed: 'When the South African army got defeated in Angola, that was an excellent thing. It was a very painful thing for them in their hearts, I'm sure. It was a victory for us. It was a happy thing to happen'.³⁶⁴

³⁵⁷ Ibid, 22 December 1975.

³⁵⁸ Report of February 1976 interview with Nujoma in Luanda: Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 290.

³⁵⁹ Steenkamp, 'Politics of Power', p. 194.

³⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 195.

³⁶¹ Legum, *The Battlefronts of Southern Africa*, p. 42; Menaul, *The Border Wars*, p. 6.

³⁶² Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', p. 27.

³⁶³ *Die Vaderland*, 18 February 1976.

³⁶⁴ Colligan, *Soweto Remembered*, pp. 86, 98.

The SADF established a kilometre-wide demilitarised zone and a string of new bases across northern Namibia.³⁶⁵ The number of South African troops in the country swelled from 16,000 to over 50,000 in 1976³⁶⁶ and Pretoria declared a state of emergency in northern Namibia. Neto was soon accusing Pretoria of supporting continued armed incursions along the Angolan border. On 11 July 1976, the Angolan government directly accused South African of burning three Angolan villages.³⁶⁷ However, these measures failed to stem the escalation in SWAPO infiltrations.³⁶⁸ SWAPO was able to move into southern Angola and base itself close to the border of Ovambo, the heartland of its support.³⁶⁹ Operating in bases close to the border, PLAN cadres were able to move unobtrusively into Namibia to undertake politicising work among local people. PLAN's military strategy changed with the opening of its Angolan front. Instead of 'hit and run' attacks just across the border, the objective was now to cross the 'red line' (the veterinary *cordon sanitaire* dividing the Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi regions from the white farming areas to the south). By 1977 there were three military 'fronts', northern, north-eastern and north-western, each a dedicated military unit targeting different sectors of the border.³⁷⁰ By October 1977, the SADF was claiming that contacts between security force patrols and PLAN were averaging about 100 a month.³⁷¹

The intensity of the border conflict escalated as PLAN started to use its Angola springboard more effectively and South Africa, in reaction, moved into the phase of 'external operations'.³⁷² In July 1977, General Jannie Geldenhuys was placed in command of all troops in Namibia. His strategy to counter PLAN was threefold: attempt to win the hearts and minds of the local population, intensify counter-insurgency, and, most importantly, destroy PLAN's logistical bases and supply lines in Angola. Geldenhuys, together with other Defence Force generals, argued that instead of fighting a defensive war, South Africa should stage pre-emptive attacks against SWAPO in Angola.³⁷³ On 4 May 1978, the SADF launched its first large-scale cross-border operation into Angola since Operation Savannah. The raid on Kassinga³⁷⁴, 250 kilometres inside Angola foreshadowed the phase of South African 'external operations', raids and sometimes full-scale conventional invasions which, by 1981, amounted to occupation of key areas of south-

³⁶⁵ The United Nations Commissioner for Namibia told a press conference in Lusaka on 28 August 1976, that between 40,000 and 50,000 people had been forcibly removed from the area in 'a gross violation of human rights': Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 315 fn.2.

³⁶⁶ Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, p. 25.

³⁶⁷ *Washington Post*, 12 July 1976; *New York Times*, 12 July 1976 quoted in M. El-Khawas, 'South Africa and the Angolan Conflict', (*Africa Today*, Vol. 24, No. 2, April/June 1977), p. 44.

³⁶⁸ Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, pp.100-101.

³⁶⁹ Brown, 'Diplomacy by Other Means', p. 26.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 24.

³⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 27.

³⁷² *Ibid*, p. 27.

³⁷³ See Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*.

³⁷⁴ The SADF described 'Operation Reindeer' as a pre-emptive strike against SWAPO bases at Chetequera and Kassinga: Steenkamp, *Borderstrike*, pp. 5-11. Internationally, SWAPO and its supporters claimed Kassinga was a refugee camp and not a military base, and that hundreds of civilians had been massacred: Cawthra, *Brutal Force*, p. 149; Brittain, *Death of Dignity*, p. viii. However, as Operation Reindeer did not

west Angola. Cross-border operations against SWAPO into Zambia in 1978 and 1979 (Operations Safraan and Rekstok), were followed in June 1980 by Operation Sceptic/Smokeshell. It was the Defence Force's first full-scale penetration of Angola since the 1976 withdrawal. It involved larger forces than those deployed in 1975 and saw the first serious clashes between the SADF and the Angolan army.³⁷⁵

Pretoria employed another tactic in its attempts to counter SWAPO; it continued to support Jonas Savimbi in southern Angola.³⁷⁶ On 12 February 1976, Savimbi had announced that his forces would revert to guerrilla warfare.³⁷⁷ UNITA withdrew into the south-eastern corner of Angola where it began regrouping and reorganising. By 1977 UNITA was waging a stubborn guerrilla war, which prevented the MPLA regime from consolidating its control over southern Angola. Although not a threat to the MPLA regime's survival, UNITA inflicted serious economic damage by disrupting the coffee harvest and halting the normal operation of the Benguela railway.³⁷⁸ It was after P.W. Botha became Prime Minister at the end of 1978 that large-scale support to UNITA was resumed. The SADF supplied Savimbi's guerrilla headquarters at Jamba and provided combat training and weapons for his troops.³⁷⁹ To enhance UNITA's domestic and international prestige, special SADF units helped carry out sabotage attacks against the infrastructure of southern Angola. These were then claimed by UNITA. Pretoria, assisted by the Reagan administration's position on the Cuban linkage issue³⁸⁰, attempted to strengthen UNITA's international image by projecting Savimbi as a leading pro-Western figure in African politics.³⁸¹ Savimbi was presented as a legitimate liberation leader fighting to save his country from Soviet imperialism.³⁸² The Reagan administration used South Africa as a conduit to supply arms to UNITA³⁸³, until the United States Senate repealed the Clark Amendment in August 1985.³⁸⁴ The following month the South African Minister of Defence, General Magnus Malan, publicly disclosed South African military support for UNITA for the first time.³⁸⁵

have the dire diplomatic consequences that the Department of Foreign Affairs had predicted, it paved the way for further raids: Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 83.

³⁷⁵ J. Hanlon, *Apartheid's Second Front: South Africa's War Against Its Neighbours* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1986), p. 67; Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 74.

³⁷⁶ R. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History* (Macmillan Press, London, 2000), p. 528.

³⁷⁷ Burchett, *Southern Africa Stands Up*, p. 93.

³⁷⁸ *New York Times*, 27 June 1977.

³⁷⁹ J. Harding, *Small Wars, Small Mercies: Journeys in Africa's Disputed Nations* (Viking, London, 1993), p. 7.

³⁸⁰ Both South Africa and the United States demanded a complete Cuban withdrawal from Angola. They introduced the 'linkage' issue, which made the withdrawal of South African troops from Namibia dependent upon the withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola.

³⁸¹ P. Vale, 'Regional Policy: The Compulsion to Incorporate', in J. Blumenfeld (ed.), *South Africa in Crisis* (Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1987), pp. 186-187.

³⁸² Du Pisani, A., *Beyond the Barracks: Reflections on the Role of the SADF in the Region* (South African Institute of International Affairs, Braamfontein, 1988), p. 16.

³⁸³ *The Weekly Mail*, Johannesburg, 18-24 July 1986.

³⁸⁴ Bridgland, 'The Future of Angola', p. 34.

³⁸⁵ *Paratus*, October 1985, p. 22.

The Defence Force reasoned that if UNITA controlled south-eastern Angola, SWAPO would not be able to operate from there into Namibia. Later, Angolan forces that might have helped SWAPO were tied down fighting UNITA.³⁸⁶ Destabilisation and the promotion of civil war in neighbouring countries, through UNITA in Angola and RENAMO³⁸⁷ in Mozambique, became a new strategy of defence for South Africa.

IMPACT OF ANGOLA ON THE DEFENCE FORCE

The Defence Force maintained that it was never militarily defeated in Angola. Within South Africa the SADF was portrayed either as victorious, or at least as having performed heroically under difficult circumstances.³⁸⁸ The 1977 *White Paper on Defence* stressed: 'Despite the anti-South African propaganda unleashed in an effort to discredit the South African forces in Angola, factual evidence makes it quite clear that these forces gave an excellent account of themselves in their contact with opposing forces, including the Cuban troops assisting the MPLA'.³⁸⁹ The recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa concluded that the SADF 'swept through vast areas of central and eastern Angola, capturing numerous towns until it was halted on the outskirts of Luanda by stiff Cuban-led resistance'. This conclusion was rejected by the SADF Contact Bureau, consisting of Generals Malan, Viljoen, Geldenhuys and Meiring, who claimed that it was without substance.³⁹⁰

The SADF officially claimed that 'The allied FNLA/UNITA forces supported by South African forces could have conquered the whole of Angola'. It was claimed that the reason that they did not take Luanda was because Savimbi was determined to reach a political settlement with the MPLA.³⁹¹ Subsequently, numerous other reasons were put forward. Holden Roberto was blamed for his failed attack on Luanda on the eve of independence.³⁹² General Geldenhuys claimed: 'In the end his [Roberto's] stubbornness

³⁸⁶ H.-R. Heitman & P. Hannon, *Modern African Wars 3: South West Africa* (Osprey Publishing, London, 1991), p. 39.

³⁸⁷ In response to Mozambique's support for the Zimbabwe liberation movements, the Rhodesian regime created an anti-FRELIMO guerrilla organisation, RENAMO or MNR (Mozambiquean National Resistance) within Mozambique. When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, South Africa adopted RENAMO as a means to counter ANC guerrillas: P. Hain, *Sing the Beloved Country: The Struggle for the New South Africa* (Pluto Press, London, 1996), p. 87.

³⁸⁸ For examples see: 'Angola: A Proud Military Chapter', *Paratus*, March 1976; 'SAW Onttrek Vrywillig Uit Angola...' (South African Army Withdraws Voluntarily from Angola), *Paratus*, April 1976; 'Angola: teenspoed langs die grootpad! (adversity on the highroad!): This is how the SADF became involved', *Paratus*, March 1977. The latter article was sub-titled 'How We Swept Cubans and MPLA Aside with Contemptuous Ease'.

³⁸⁹ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence 1977*, p. 6.

³⁹⁰ South African Defence Force Contact Bureau, *The Contact Bureau's Analysis of the TRC Report* (internet published, 19th April 1999).

³⁹¹ *SADF Statement, 1977*.

³⁹² The South African and American 'advisers' with Roberto had advised him against his advance on Luanda across the Quifangondo valley. The SADF supported the FNLA/Zairean column with four manned 5.5-inch artillery pieces and three SAAF Mirage fighters unsuccessfully bombed the Cuban-MPLA

sabotaged not only his own future but, to a large extent, that of Operation Savannah as well'.³⁹³ The Defence Force also shared the government's belief that South Africa had been betrayed by its Western and African 'allies'.³⁹⁴ General Viljoen has stated: 'There is absolutely no doubt the Americans left us in the lurch'.³⁹⁵ It was reported that the Defence Force had wanted to continue with Operation Savannah³⁹⁶ and felt that it was made to bear the stigma of withdrawal from Angola unfairly.³⁹⁷

Although Admiral Biermann, the Chief of the SADF, maintained his silence on the subject until his unexpectedly early retirement in July 1976³⁹⁸, the military high command believed that South Africa's politicians were responsible for the damage to its credibility.³⁹⁹ Colonel Jan Breytenbach has claimed that the Defence Force was not given a clear directive: 'They never told us what the objective was. The military objectives changed with the political objectives'.⁴⁰⁰ General Malan, who was Chief of the Army during Operation Savannah, has stated: 'We were let down by our politicians'.⁴⁰¹ Breytenbach believes that, 'Militarily it was a success. We had them running. We were winning the war but back home the politicians were busy losing it. Vorster and Van den Bergh got cold feet politically speaking. We only needed a couple more weeks, but their courage failed them'.⁴⁰² General Geldenhuys was more magnanimous: 'I do not intend to blame the politicians. They have their considerations and military objectives are always subordinate to the overall political strategy. I did not have to worry about Clark Amendments, or UN and OAU sessions'.⁴⁰³ There was specific criticism of the Department of Foreign Affairs and BOSS.⁴⁰⁴ BOSS was blamed for miscalculating American intentions and the military high command held Van den Bergh personally accountable.⁴⁰⁵

positions. The FNLA column fled in the face of heavy artillery fire: Moss, 'Battle of Death Road', *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977; Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 136-137; Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, pp. 116-117; De Villiers, *PW*, pp. 256-258.

³⁹³ Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, p. 54.

³⁹⁴ Du Preez, *Avontuur in Angola*, p. xii. During an exchange in Parliament on 6 May 1976, PRP MP Harry Schwarz said that he had been told by Botha that South African troops had not entered Luanda because of opposition from Washington: Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, cols. 6223-6224.

³⁹⁵ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 40.

³⁹⁶ *The Guardian*, 22 January 1976. This claim was supported by Jan Breytenbach in interview with this author.

³⁹⁷ Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, p. 284.

³⁹⁸ J. Serfontein, *Namibia?* (Fokus Suid Publishers, Randburg, 1976), p. 336.

³⁹⁹ Grundy, *Soldiers Without Politics*, p. 284.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Jan Breytenbach.

⁴⁰¹ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 44.

⁴⁰² Interview with Jan Breytenbach.

⁴⁰³ Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, p. 55.

⁴⁰⁴ B. Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency: PW Botha, The First Ten Years* (Southern Book Publishers, Johannesburg, 1988), p. 205.

⁴⁰⁵ K. Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1988), p. 90; Pottinger, *The Imperial Presidency*, p. 46. General Hein du Toit, the SADF's Chief of Staff Intelligence at the time, has claimed: 'Van den Bergh staffed BOSS with security policemen who knew a little about internal operations but absolutely nothing about how to work overseas': Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 3-4.

Credibility
Gulch...

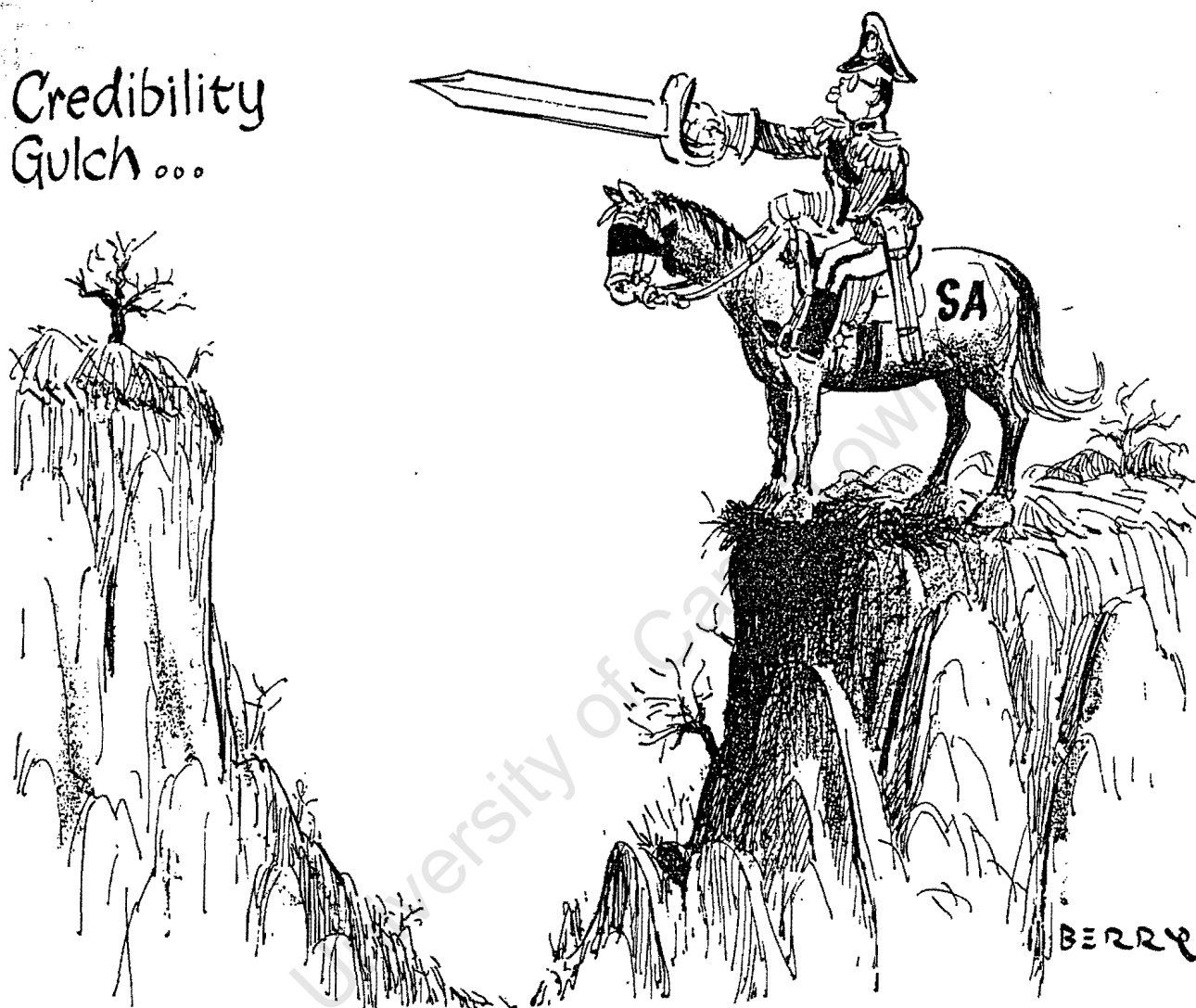


Figure 11: The military high command believed that South Africa's politicians were responsible for the credibility gap that had developed.

[A. Berry, *Act by Act: 40 Years of Nationalist Rule in South Africa*,
A Cartoon History of Apartheid (Lowry Publishers, Johannesburg, 1989), p. 61]

The SADF felt that it had not been permitted to fight without fetters in Angola. It claimed that military operations had been hampered by the lack of a clear political objective and the fact that there was often indecision about whether involvement should be escalated or even discontinued.⁴⁰⁶ The military also resented the politicians' restrictions on weaponry and personnel.⁴⁰⁷ Vorster had decreed that no more than 2,500 men and 600 vehicles could be used, and casualties were to be kept to a minimum.⁴⁰⁸ General Malan has asked: 'How could they expect us to do the job properly when they put those sort of troop restrictions on us? We were hamstrung before we even started, but as soldiers we went ahead and did the job.'⁴⁰⁹ Although South Africa's military effort was limited and could have been substantially increased, the SADF's claim that it 'could have gone all the way' to Luanda is only conditionally true. In early November the two major SADF-led combat groups probably had the momentum and capability to take Luanda, but the stiffening opposition by MPLA and Cuban forces would probably have begun to inflict intolerably heavy casualties.⁴¹⁰

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SADF

'The South African Defence Force by all professional criteria is Africa's premier military organisation... Yet this force that is so central to the fortunes of the Republic of South Africa is in almost all respects a new force. It was all but born out of the birth pangs of Operation Savannah'.

(Roherty, *State Security in South Africa*, p. 27).

Attempts to modernise the Defence Force were begun in response to the changed political climate of the 1960s. However, according to Helmoed-Römer Heitman, an authority on the SADF, 'the most important impetus was the experience of the 1975-76 incursion into Angola. This removed most remaining doubts concerning the need to rebuild the Army's conventional forces'.⁴¹¹ Pretoria sought an enhanced military

⁴⁰⁶ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 79.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 80.

⁴⁰⁸ Interview with General Andre van Deventer. (When South Africa stayed in Angola after 11 November, 101 Task Force was established and General André J. van Deventer took command of the operation). In fact, South African troops eventually numbered 4,000-5,000 men: Legum & Hodges, *After Angola*, p. 37; W. Steenkamp, "'Rommel" in Angola', in L. Scholtz (ed.), *Beroemde Suid-Afrikaanse Krygsmanne* (Rubicon-Pers, Cape Town, 1984), p. 181.

⁴⁰⁹ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 31.

⁴¹⁰ See the pessimistic reports of Generals Andre van Deventer, Magnus Malan and Constand Viljoen in Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, pp. 259, 261, 264. When the SADF's 1987 military campaign in Angola led to large numbers of troop deaths it provoked a wave of war resistance which significantly, included the Afrikaans community for the first time: Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Out of Step: War Resistance in South Africa* (Catholic Institute for International Relations, London, 1989), p. 120.

⁴¹¹ H.-R. Heitman, *South African Armed Forces* (Buffalo Publications, Cape Town, 1990), p. 20. The Army Battle School was established at Lohatla, in the northern Cape, with suitable terrain for ground forces to train in conventional war techniques: J. Selfe, *The Total Onslaught and the Total Strategy: Adaptations to the Security Intelligence Decision-Making Structures under PW Botha's Administration* (MA thesis, UCT,

capability in line with its understanding of the changed strategic situation. The Defence Force was modernised and re-equipped in order to conduct large-scale pre-emptive raids into neighbouring countries and to counter any conventional attack. The Defence Force was to have two roles: counter-insurgency at home and the projection, if necessary, of conventional power abroad.⁴¹² General Geldenhuys, who conducted the debriefing conferences after Operation Savannah, has described the changes that were instituted: 'We identified and formulated the lessons we had learnt and planned our follow-up programme of action. We made substantial changes and adjustments, which proved invaluable later on. The improvements affected battle techniques and procedures; hardware projects; closer cooperation between different corps of the Army, and between the arms and branches of the service'.⁴¹³

CLOSER RELATIONS BETWEEN ARMS OF THE DEFENCE FORCE

'The Army and the Air Force had been talking about joint operations for quite some time, but it had always been pretty theoretical. Savannah stopped that from being theoretical. It was realised that it was essential for the Army and Air Force to work together. By the latter stages of the border war they were working so closely together that in at least one case the ground operations were directed by a helicopter pilot. That's how close they got. That was an important effect of Savannah.
(Interview with Willem Steenkamp)

Botha told Parliament that in Angola the Air Force had only been used 'in a supporting capacity, i.e. in a transport capacity' and that the Navy had only been used in a guarding capacity.⁴¹⁴ In fact, the SAAF had flown reconnaissance missions, had provided an air strike during the FNLA's attempt to take Luanda and, when that attack failed, had airlifted troops from north of Luanda onto the frigate SAS President Steyn.⁴¹⁵ It has been claimed that a lack of coordination between the Army and Air Force during Operation Savannah had hampered the military effort. According to Willem Steenkamp, a breakdown in communications resulted in a 'friendly fire' incident. Army anti-aircraft gunners were not warned that an Air Force helicopter would be over flying and shot it down killing four South Africans.⁴¹⁶

1987), p. 64. In 1978 the first formation-level exercise in conventional warfare for almost ten years was carried out: Heitman, *The South African War Machine*, p. 38.

⁴¹² J. Spence, 'The Military in South African Politics', in S. Johnson (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (Macmillan Press, London, 1988), p. 241.

⁴¹³ Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, p. 56.

⁴¹⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 6 May 1976, col. 6220.

⁴¹⁵ M. Louw & S. Bouwer, *The South African Air Force at War* (Chris van Rensburg Publications, Johannesburg, 1995), p. 141; D. Becker, *On Wings of Eagles: South Africa's Military Aviation History* (South African Air Force and Walker-Ramus Trading Co., Durban 1996), p. 217. Brig. B. de V. Roos, who had been liaison officer with the FNLA at Ambriz, was picked up with his men at the Ambrizette harbour on 28 November 1975: De Villiers, *PW*, p. 259.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Willem Steenkamp. The incident is confirmed by Hilton Hamann in *Days of the Generals*, p. 39.

Communication between the Army and the Navy during the early stages of Operation Savannah was non-existent.⁴¹⁷ Until early November 1975, no one in the Navy knew that the SADF had been directly involved in the Angolan war. The Army sought no advice or assistance from the Navy until the operation was approaching the original termination date of 11 November 1975. The planning staff at Defence Headquarters who had been running Operation Savannah, a small group of 'designated initiates', did not include a naval officer.⁴¹⁸ The first the Chief of the Navy, Vice Admiral J. Johnson, knew about Operation Savannah was when an instruction was received from SADF Headquarters on 3 November 1975, that a frigate be prepared to patrol the Angolan coast. At the time Johnson was attending a cocktail party hosted by the Chief of the Air Force, Lt Gen. R. Rogers. When Johnson asked Rogers about Operation Savannah he was told that if the Chief of the Navy did not know about the operation then the Chief of the Air Force was not authorised to tell him. Although Johnson was eventually given a full briefing, the Navy was still not placed on an equal footing with the Army and the Air Force.⁴¹⁹

Rear Admiral Chris Bennett, who was Senior Staff Officer Operations (Navy) at the time, has stated: 'It is extremely difficult to say in retrospect what the actual effects of this failing in the planning staff was on operations and the long-term political situation. After all, the enemy was using the coastline and being very effectively supported by sea, and a proper South African naval presence could have influenced the situation markedly'. One effect of Operation Savannah was that it showed that Naval Headquarters should be located with the other Defence Force Headquarters in Pretoria. In late 1976 it was announced that Naval Headquarters were to be transferred from Simonstown to Pretoria so that the functions of the three service arms could be better coordinated. Announcing the decision Botha said that he had first been sceptical of the idea but that circumstances had so changed 'in this dangerous world of today' that the decision had to be taken earlier than had been expected.⁴²⁰ According to Bennett, the success of the move was confirmed by the 'excellent co-operation and support' between the Navy and the other services during operations in the 1980's.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁷ The following details were provided by Rear Admiral Chris Bennett who was Senior Staff Officer Operations (Navy). He was the first person in the Navy (apart from the cryptographic staff at Silvermine and Naval Headquarters) to hear about Operation Savannah.

⁴¹⁸ This group initially came together weekly, but once things 'hotted up' met on a daily basis. It included one Major General (Army) and one Brigadier (Air Force) from Chief of the SADF's operations staff, one Lieutenant General and one Brigadier each from Army and Air Force Headquarters, plus senior Military Intelligence and Logistic staff representatives.

⁴¹⁹ The regular Navy representative at the, by then daily, meetings in Pretoria, was a Commander (not a Commodore as claimed in Spies & du Preez, *Operasie Savannah*, p. 144). One of the two designated Commodores flew up from Cape Town once a week.

⁴²⁰ *South African Digest*, 12 November 1976, p. 4.

⁴²¹ Correspondence with Chris Bennett.

NEW WEAPONS

'Politically the MPLA and Cubans had everything on their side and in terms of equipment they also had all the advantages. But that was one of the best things that ever happened to South Africa. It made the politicians realise they'd better spend money on the military or else, sooner or later, we were going to end up getting a hiding.'
(General Malan quoted in Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, pp. 44-45).

In February 1976, Botha admitted that 'South Africa has no answers to some of the weapons being used by Cubans in Angola.'⁴²² Operation Savannah was the Defence Force's first experience of conventional warfare since the Second World War, and had shown up its inadequacies in weaponry, particularly long-range artillery and armoured firepower. Consequently the Armaments Corporation of South Africa (ARMSCOR) embarked on a major programme for the procurement and development of modern equipment.⁴²³ South Africa's defence expenditure for 1976-1977 was R1,350 million, 300 percent more than the level in 1973-1974 and 17.2 percent of the government's total budget.⁴²⁴

The artillery that the SADF faced in Angola, Soviet-supplied guns and multiple rocket-launchers, had outranged the South African World War II-vintage artillery.⁴²⁵ The Defence Force had been unprepared, in particular, for the 122mm Soviet Katyusha rockets, known as 'Red Eyes'.⁴²⁶ During the operation, Vorster had told De Villiers Graaf that the SADF's forward troops had run into a new weapon of Soviet origin and that the entire South African advance had been halted at the Cuanza River, 100 kilometres south of Luanda, pending the supply of suitable artillery from the United States or France.⁴²⁷ Although not very sophisticated in terms of being able to deliver pinpoint accuracy, the 122mm was capable of carrying a 20kg warhead and was effective over a 40m radius from where it struck. The rockets were fired from 'Stalin Organs', BM-21 multi-tubed mobile rocket launchers, which had a range of 20 kilometres.⁴²⁸ They outranged the British 80-pounder (5.5 inch) cannons used by South Africans.⁴²⁹ They had a devastating impact on the South African offensive. There were many reported cases of UNITA and FNLA troops fleeing in panic and refusing to continue fighting.⁴³⁰ The Army brought a captured Stalin Organ back from Angola⁴³¹ and it was

⁴²² In response to Botha's claim, the Progressive Reform Party stressed, 'If there is a danger of being out-gunned or out-ranged, the weapons must be made or must be bought and the price must be paid': Harry Schwarz, Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 28 January 1976, col. 213.

⁴²³ Heitman, *South African Armed Forces*, p. 20. In 1976 the Armaments Board and the Armaments Development and Production Corporation were merged to form ARMSCOR: Roherty, *State Security in South Africa*, p. 123 fn.53.

⁴²⁴ *The Star*, 3 April 1976.

⁴²⁵ Interview with Philip Schalkwyk (Chief of Staff, 2 Military Area at Cela); Heitman, *South African Armed Forces*, p. 20.

⁴²⁶ Interview with Jan Breytenbach. The rockets glowed red earning them this nickname.

⁴²⁷ Graaff, *Div Looks Back*, pp. 242-243.

⁴²⁸ Venter, *Vorster's Africa*, p. 213.

⁴²⁹ Uys, *Cross of Honour*, p. 26.

⁴³⁰ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 33.

used to produce the Valkiri 127mm multiple rocket launcher, which was fired in battle for the first time in 1981, during Operation Protea.⁴³² The G-5 155mm artillery system was also developed. Announced in 1979, the G-5 had a range of up to 30 kilometres and was designed to replace the World War II generation of guns.⁴³³

The United Nations voluntary arms embargo against South Africa had led the Verwoerd administration to begin efforts to build up a local arms industry in the 1960s.⁴³⁴ However, although the government claimed that 94 percent of the equipment used in Operation Savannah was of South African manufacture⁴³⁵, this was a massive over-estimate. The Defence Force's experience in Angola underscored its concern that the arms boycott might widen whilst its enemies gained greater access to weapons from Soviet arsenals.⁴³⁶ These fears were confirmed by the mandatory United Nations embargo of November 1977. The result was 'a spectacular period of growth in South Africa's armaments industry, almost unparalleled in the history of armaments development'.⁴³⁷ South Africa built up the tenth largest arms industry in the world and was soon able to manufacture most of its own weapons.⁴³⁸ Botha's official biography concluded that 'Without Operation Savannah ARMSCOR would not have become the giant that made South Africa independent in its arms requirements – armaments specifically designed for war situations in Africa'.⁴³⁹

Following Vorster's visit to Israel in April 1976 press reports suggested that the two heads of state had discussed the joint construction of nuclear weapons.⁴⁴⁰ During 1977 there was continuing speculation about South Africa's nuclear warfare capability. The *Washington Post* quoted American and British sources who believed that South Africa was close to producing an atomic bomb.⁴⁴¹ In response Connie Mulder said that should South Africa be attacked it would use all the means at its disposal 'whatever they may be'. He also pointed out that South Africa had never signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. In August 1977, it was reported that Soviet and American spy satellites had spotted preparations for the testing of a nuclear

⁴³¹ It was exhibited at the Pretoria show from August-September 1976: *South African Digest*, 17 September 1976, p. 10.

⁴³² Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 76; Roherty, *State Security in South Africa*, p. 113.

⁴³³ Heitman, *South African Armed Forces*, pp. 27, 46.

⁴³⁴ R. Jaster, 'South African Defense Strategy', p. 125; Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 268; D. Geldenhuys, 'South Africa and the West', in R. Schrire (ed.), *South Africa: Public Policy Perspectives* (Juta & Co., Cape Town, 1982), pp. 306-307.

⁴³⁵ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence and Armaments Production, 1982* (Department of Defence, Pretoria, 1982), p. 23.

⁴³⁶ De St. Jorre, *A House Divided*, p. 96.

⁴³⁷ W. Dorning, 'A Concise History of the South African Defence Force (1912-1987)', (*Militaria*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1987), p. 21.

⁴³⁸ Coker, *South Africa's Security Dilemmas*, p. 2.

⁴³⁹ De Villiers, *PW*, p. 241.

⁴⁴⁰ R. Leonard, *South Africa at War: White Power and the Crisis in Southern Africa* (Lawrence Hill, Westport, Connecticut, 1983), p. 11.

⁴⁴¹ *Washington Post*, 10 February 1977.

weapon in the Kalahari Desert.⁴⁴² When the United Nations Security Council imposed a mandatory arms embargo on South Africa in November 1977, it included in its justification reference to South Africa being on the brink of producing nuclear weapons.⁴⁴³

However, it was only in 1993 that President F.W. de Klerk confirmed that South Africa had developed nuclear weapons.⁴⁴⁴ It has been claimed that South Africa's experience in Angola provided the final impetus for the development of its clandestine nuclear weapons programme.⁴⁴⁵ The presence of Cuban forces in Angola, and the increase in Soviet influence that this represented, strengthened the incentive to acquire a nuclear capability in order to deter further Soviet intrusion in Rhodesia, Namibia or South Africa.⁴⁴⁶ Self-sufficiency in terms of defence against the 'total onslaught' involved acquiring a nuclear capability.⁴⁴⁷ Nuclear weapons could also be used as leverage with Western powers, by demonstrating their existence and then threatening to resort to nuclear attack if outside assistance proved necessary and was not provided.

During a hearing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission it was claimed that the Defence Force's experience in Angola influenced the decision to develop a chemical and biological warfare programme. In the early 1980s a CBW programme, code-named 'Project Coast', was established under the auspices of the SADF. At a public hearing of the TRC in 1998⁴⁴⁸, the former project manager, Daniel Knobel, claimed that during Operation Savannah South African troops confiscated Cuban-operated vehicles in Angola. These were found to be fitted with air filters, gas masks and medical bags containing nerve gas antidotes. According to Knobel, this caused the Defence Force to believe that the Cubans intended to use chemical weapons and that South African soldiers operating in Angola needed a defensive CBW capacity to counter the threat.⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴² Leonard, *South Africa at War*, p. 11.

⁴⁴³ Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 208.

⁴⁴⁴ D. Howlett & J. Simpson, 'Nuclearisation and Denuclearisation in South Africa', (*Survival*, London, Vol. 35, No. 3, Autumn 1993), p. 155. He also claimed that the government had subsequently dismantled them.

⁴⁴⁵ Howlett & Simpson, 'Nuclearisation and Denuclearisation in South Africa', p. 155; Alden, *Apartheid's Last Stand*, p. 40.

⁴⁴⁶ J. Spence, 'The Nuclear Option', in J. Roherty (ed.), *Defense Policy Formation*, p. 118.

⁴⁴⁷ Jaster, *Narrowing Security Options*, p. 28.

⁴⁴⁸ In a separate criminal trial, the project officer, Dr Wouter Basson, was acquitted of charges ranging from fraud to murder. Many questions remain as to the extent, achievements, and fate of this programme.

⁴⁴⁹ C. Gould & P. Folb, *The South African Chemical and Biological Warfare Program: An Overview* (internet published, September 2000). The authors, who participated in the Truth & Reconciliation Commission investigation into chemical and biological warfare, stressed that Project Coast was not solely a defensive measure and that the development of crowd control agents (in the wake of the Soweto uprising) was an important motivating factor.

NEW UNITS

The SADF formed two new units from remnants of its allies in Angola. Task Force Zulu had included Battle Group Alpha of Angolan San ('Bushmen') who had previously acted as trackers for the Portuguese. Following the withdrawal of the Portuguese from Angola, many of these 'Flechas' (Arrows) fled into Namibia and were recruited by the SADF.⁴⁵⁰ Commandant Delville Linford, who had experience of Flecha operations from his time as senior South African liaison officer with the Portuguese forces in Angola, had secretly trained the Bushmen for cross-border operations against SWAPO. During Operation Savannah the Bushmen fought alongside their previous enemies the FNLA and UNITA.⁴⁵¹ In September 1976 Battle Group Alpha was officially recognised and designated 31 Battalion (later 201 Battalion).⁴⁵²

Alongside the Bushmen in Task Force Zulu was Battle Group Bravo, made up of Daniel Chipenda's FNLA troops under Jan Breytenbach. At the end of Operation Savannah, Breytenbach refused to leave his troops behind in Angola and they were withdrawn to South Africa.⁴⁵³ They were retrained and re-equipped and formed into the secret 32 (Buffalo) Battalion, based in the Caprivi Strip. Under Breytenbach they operated against PLAN in southern Angola where their attacks were passed off as the work of UNITA.⁴⁵⁴ The Battalion's existence was only publicly acknowledged by the South African government in 1981, following revelations published in *The Guardian*.⁴⁵⁵

IMPROVEMENTS IN LOGISTICS

During Operation Savannah the Defence Force's logistic support systems were found to be outdated.⁴⁵⁶ Indeed it was judged by one military commentator to have been 'a logistics disaster'.⁴⁵⁷ According to Jan Breytenbach: 'During Savannah we were pretty much told to live off the land'.⁴⁵⁸ Strategically the most serious omission was that although the Army had engineers in Angola it did not have any bridging equipment.⁴⁵⁹ As the South African and UNITA/FNLA columns moved north the MPLA and Cuban forces slowed their advance by destroying bridges. This led to a stalemate at the Queve River in late November with the Zulu column holding Novo Redondo and the MPLA holding Porto Amboim.⁴⁶⁰ Probes by Task

⁴⁵⁰ Weaver, 'The South African Defence Force in Namibia', p. 101.

⁴⁵¹ Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, p. 17.

⁴⁵² Uys, *Bushman Soldiers*, p. 59; Geldenhuys, *A General's Story*, p. 58.

⁴⁵³ Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, p. 65.

⁴⁵⁴ See Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword* and *Forged in Battle*.

⁴⁵⁵ *The Guardian*, 29 January and 2 February 1981. Trevor Edwards, a Briton who had served as a mercenary platoon commander with 32 Battalion, made a series of allegations about the wide-scale massacre of Angolans by 32 Battalion.

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with Willem Steenkamp; Heitman, *South African Armed Forces*, p. 20.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Helmoed-Römer Heitman.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with Jan Breytenbach.

⁴⁵⁹ Breytenbach, *They Live by the Sword*, p. 55; Interview with Philip Schalkwyk.

⁴⁶⁰ Moss, *Sunday Telegraph*, 13 February 1977; Marcum, *The Angolan Revolution*, Vol. II, p. 272.

Forces 'Foxbat' and 'Orange'⁴⁶¹ towards Quibala were also stalled by blown bridges. South African troops were therefore forced to use tree-trunks as crude bridges for their vehicles.⁴⁶² There were subsequent rumours that the South African forces had run short of weapons, ammunition and food as a result of ineptitude in the organisation and transport of supplies from South Africa.⁴⁶³ This apparently led to the sacking or demotion of some officers and the appointment of a senior officer to reorganise the stocking, records and transport of supplies. The SADF also began to compile computer records of all its war materials.⁴⁶⁴ According to the 1977 *White Paper on Defence* the SADF's logistics system had been overhauled and the concept of 'log-ops' (logistics in support of operations) had been introduced.⁴⁶⁵

MANPOWER AND AREA OF SERVICE

Operation Savannah clearly demonstrated the manpower shortages facing the Defence Force. In mid-December 1975, Botha had been forced to announce that the period of service for some National Servicemen would be extended for a month and that a number of Citizen Force units would be called up for annual training camps of twelve weeks, instead of the usual 19 days.⁴⁶⁶ In 1977 the government increased the length of national service to two years and the length of the annual Citizen Force camps to 30 days each year, over an eight-year period.⁴⁶⁷

When the South African public was finally informed about their country's intervention in Angola, questions were raised about whether it had been legal for the government to send national service conscripts out of the country.⁴⁶⁸ The Defence Act of 1957 included a stipulation of written consent: 'A member of the South African Defence Force may be required in time of war to perform service against an enemy anywhere in South Africa, whether within or outside the Union and may with his written consent be required to perform such service outside South Africa.'⁴⁶⁹ Botha stressed that 'Everyone serving over the

⁴⁶¹ Orange was a fourth battle group formed in November 1975 to operate in the east of Angola.

⁴⁶² Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 72.

⁴⁶³ Memorandum from Wilf Nussey, head of the Argus Africa News Service, to South African newspaper editors quoted in Tyson, *Editors Under Fire*, pp. 186-187.

⁴⁶⁴ Memorandum from Nussey quoted in Tyson, *Editors Under Fire*, pp. 186-187.

⁴⁶⁵ Republic of South Africa Department of Defence, *White Paper on Defence*, 1977, p. 25.

⁴⁶⁶ South African Institute of Race Relations, *A Survey of Race Relations in South Africa 1976*, p. 37.

⁴⁶⁷ Dorning, 'A Concise History of the South African Defence Force', p. 22; National Union of South African Students, *Total War in South Africa: Militarisation and the Apartheid State* (Allies Press, Johannesburg, 1985), p. 6.

⁴⁶⁸ Pogrand, *War of Words*, p. 238; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Final Report*, Vol.2, Chapter 2, line 14.

⁴⁶⁹ Defence Act, No. 44 of 1957, section 95 (1)(a) quoted in Grundy, *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics*, p. 37. To avoid reopening old wounds in the aftermath of the Anglo-Boer war, Generals Jan Smuts and Louis Botha had included the 'volunteer clause' in their South African Defence Act of 1912. This was a result of objections, mainly among Afrikaners, to military service in those wars that had been seen as beneficial to the British Empire: C. Moskos & J. Chambers (eds), *The New Conscientious Objection: From Sacred to Secular Resistance* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993), p. 128. The clause followed in the

border in Angola is doing so on a voluntary basis.⁴⁷⁰ Further statements by the Defence Force reiterated Botha's assertion and referred to a 'form' that soldiers had to sign before they could be sent into Angola.⁴⁷¹ Defence officials refused repeated press requests to view the form, leading some to question whether it actually existed.⁴⁷² There was a steady stream of complaints to newspapers and Members of Parliament from parents who said that they had not given permission for their minor sons to fight outside South Africa.⁴⁷³ Vause Raw, of the United Party, claimed that 'literally dozens' of parents had raised the question with him.⁴⁷⁴ Similarly Helen Suzman, of the PRP, claimed that parents had phoned her to say that their sons were hundreds of kilometres inside Angola, and asked whether the government had the right to send them there.⁴⁷⁵ Such speculations led the government to introduce a Defence Amendment Bill, when Parliament opened in 1976.⁴⁷⁶

The Defence Amendment Act (No. 1. of 1976) removed all geographic limits on the external deployment of SADF members without their prior written consent. The Amendment allowed the Defence Force to send personnel 'to perform service against an enemy at any place outside the Republic'.⁴⁷⁷ 'Service in defence of the Republic' was broadened to include 'any armed conflict outside the Republic which, in the opinion of the State President, is or may be a threat to the security of the Republic'.⁴⁷⁸ The Act was made retroactive to 9 August 1975, the date that South African forces had crossed into Angola to occupy Calueque. According to Botha this was 'in order to obviate any doubt which may exist in regard to the legality of action taken to date'.⁴⁷⁹ The Progressive Reform Party wanted to retain the volunteer principle⁴⁸⁰ and

Boer/Commando tradition, which held that a citizen army had to be consulted before being sent abroad: Seegers, *Dimensions of Militarisation*, p. 19.

⁴⁷⁰ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 January 1976. A Defence Force spokesman seeking to dispel the (correct) implication that South African troops were therefore deep inside Angola, stressed that Botha had been referring to the troops guarding the hydroelectric facilities.

⁴⁷¹ *Rand Daily Mail*, 9 January 1976 and 10 January 1976.

⁴⁷² *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 January 1976. In response to an appeal in several national newspapers, the present author was contacted by twenty ex-servicemen who had taken part in Operation Savannah. These included Permanent Force members, National Servicemen and Citizen Force soldiers. The majority of these ex-servicemen specifically recalled signing a form of consent to enter Angola. However, there was a certain degree of confusion regarding the form. Several of those interviewed believed that they had signed away their South African citizenship and become mercenaries.

⁴⁷³ For examples see, *Rand Daily Mail*, 24 January 1976 and *Sunday Times*, 25 January 1976. *The Star* (weekly edition), 17 January 1976, included a brief legal analysis by Dr. H. Booysen entitled, 'Border Duty and South African Law'. The bulk of the forces in Angola during 1975 were National Servicemen (mainly under the age of 21) as they were instantly available and could be sent off without any of the public fanfare (and consequent demands for information) that a Citizen Force call-up would entail.

⁴⁷⁴ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 January 1976, col. 63.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 29 January 1976, col. 341.

⁴⁷⁶ Grundy, *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics*, p. 41.

⁴⁷⁷ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 3 February 1976, cols 851-853.

⁴⁷⁸ Republic of South Africa, Defence Amendment Act, No. 1 of 1976 quoted in Grundy, *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics*, p. 42.

⁴⁷⁹ Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 2 February 1976, col. 401.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid*: (Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert), 2 February 1976, col. 424; (Colin Eglin), 3 February 1976, col. 483.

objected to the definition of armed conflict outside South Africa as part of the defence of South Africa.⁴⁸¹ Colin Eglin stressed that 'the Government is asking Parliament for a licence to intervene militarily in foreign countries'.⁴⁸² Although the PRP rejected the Bill, members of the United Party were more emphatic than National Party members in their readiness to remove all geographical restrictions on the SADF, and the Act was passed with relative ease.⁴⁸³ The Amendment led one analyst to judge: 'Clearly, the South African Government was gearing up for the era of civil and guerrilla warfare.'⁴⁸⁴

MILITARY-PRESS RELATIONS

'South Africa's military men began their political education over Angola: not only did it throw them into the limelight of international politics but it taught them the vital necessity of artful propaganda back at home.'

(Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 206.)

Writing in 1985, Helmoed-Römer Heitman commented that 'the obsessive secrecy surrounding the operation [Savannah] even after it had become public knowledge all over the world did serious damage to the standing and credibility of the SADF in the eyes of its nation – damage that has not yet been fully made good'.⁴⁸⁵ The government never attempted a complete news blackout again. The Defence Force and government learnt from Operation Savannah that the press and public opinion, at home and abroad, needed sophisticated and careful handling.⁴⁸⁶ In February 1976, Botha summoned representatives of the National Press Union for discussions on their Defence Agreement with the government. The result was an extension of the SADF's Directorate of Public Relations. The military-press liaison section at Defence Headquarters was strengthened by the recruitment of a number of professional journalists as public relations officers (PROs). A Defence Committee, composed of representatives from the NPU and the military, was established to oversee the broad policy of news publication. The Committee drew up a list of accredited defence correspondents who had the sole right to approach military PROs and top personnel for news releases.⁴⁸⁷

In interviews conducted by Graeme Addison with senior journalists and defence correspondents for his study *Censorship of the Press in South Africa during the Angolan War: A Case Study of News Manipulation and Suppression*, there was a general consensus that press-military contacts had improved thanks to the lessons of the war.⁴⁸⁸ According to the defence correspondent Willem Steenkamp: 'What

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, 2 February 1976, cols. 425-426.

⁴⁸² Ibid, 3 February 1976, col. 489.

⁴⁸³ Grundy, *Defense Legislation and Communal Politics*, p. 5.

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 42.

⁴⁸⁵ Heitman, *The South African War Machine*, p. 174.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 30.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, pp. 60-61.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 66.

happened was the Defence Force reacted very fast and they set up a proper public relations section. They set up a system of accredited defence correspondents and they gave them quite genuine in-depth briefings two or three times a year. What it amounted to was that quite a lot of stuff could be published. So it was quite an effective system. They realised that the old blind censorship didn't work at all.⁴⁸⁹ Subsequently the government tried to co-opt the services of the press where possible, so moving towards 'a more effective hegemony'.⁴⁹⁰ The government learnt that it could use the media to good effect by selectively releasing pre-censored information. The dependence of the press on the Defence Force as a monopoly source of military news meant newspapers frequently became the conduit for government propaganda.⁴⁹¹ Writing in 1981, Graeme Addison judged: 'The mistakes of news censorship appear to have been carefully analysed by the SADF, and clearly the military press officers have become more expert at their job of selling a 'positive' image of the Defence Force.' He believed that the Angolan war marked 'a watershed in press-Government relations in South Africa'.⁴⁹²

DEFENCE FORCE'S ROLE IN POLICY-MAKING

In *The Diplomacy of Isolation: South African Foreign Policy Making*, Deon Geldenhuys identified the Defence Force as the most vocal 'hawks' over the Angolan issue. As Minister of Defence, Botha had outmanoeuvred BOSS and the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), both of which were 'powerful domestic voices raised against South Africa's involvement in the Angola war'.⁴⁹³ It was only towards the end of South Africa's involvement in Angola that the DFA was able to exert any influence over events.⁴⁹⁴ At the outset the Department found itself largely excluded from the decision-making on Angola. It might have provided a more accurate assessment of the impact of South Africa's invasion in Africa and elsewhere, but it was not consulted.⁴⁹⁵ The DFA and Hilgard Mullers' discreet diplomacy of détente, together with their almost religious adherence to the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, was in stark contrast to the Defence Force's belief that South Africa should take a hand in shaping Angola's destiny.⁴⁹⁶ The DFA's relegation to the sidelines was evidenced by their hearing of the SADF's first major offensive, the advance on Pereira d'Eça on 22 August 1975, only when the Portuguese government handed South Africa's ambassador in Lisbon a note of protest.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁸⁹ Interview with Willem Steenkamp.

⁴⁹⁰ Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid, p. 37; M. Breytenbach, *The Manipulation of Public Opinion by State Censorship of the Media in South Africa, 1974-1994* (PhD, Dept of Journalism, University of Stellenbosch, 1997), p. 191.

⁴⁹² Addison, *Censorship of the Press in South Africa*, p. 31.

⁴⁹³ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 80.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 82; Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians*, p. 150.

⁴⁹⁵ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 27.

⁴⁹⁶ Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, pp. 208-209.

⁴⁹⁷ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, pp. 79-80.

Van den Bergh of BOSS stressed that he had always been opposed to South African military involvement in Angola and claimed the credit for South Africa's eventual withdrawal.⁴⁹⁸ General Hein du Toit has confirmed that Van den Bergh opposed intervention and has even alleged that he tried to sabotage the Defence Force's efforts in Angola by withholding information.⁴⁹⁹ However, Van den Bergh's role seems to have been more complicated than one of simple opposition. He had been involved in the supply of arms to the anti-MPLA forces and had been in personal contact with the leaders of these movements. Furthermore, BOSS had been a channel for communications with the CIA and the African governments that had urged South Africa to intervene in Angola.⁵⁰⁰

According to Geldenhuys, the Defence Force took a cynical view of Van den Bergh's proclaimed opposition, claiming that he was bound to object to anything suggested or undertaken by the military.⁵⁰¹ There was nothing less than antipathy between Van den Bergh and Botha.⁵⁰² Botha and the military had long resented Van den Bergh's position as Vorster's right-hand man.⁵⁰³ Relations between the Defence Force and Van den Bergh had not been helped when Vorster, under pressure from Van den Bergh, had used the police in Rhodesia, which the SADF felt was a military matter.⁵⁰⁴ There was also a long-standing internecine rivalry between Military Intelligence and BOSS, its civilian counterpart.⁵⁰⁵ The Potgieter Commission, appointed by Vorster in 1969 to investigate which agency should control intelligence-gathering operations, had done little to clarify the situation.⁵⁰⁶ The head of Rhodesian intelligence has claimed that, in March 1976, Van den Bergh appealed to him 'to commit to the wastepaper basket all reports received from their Military Intelligence'. He wrote: 'It was depressing for us on our visits to South Africa to have to listen to BOSS reviling the Military, [and] the Military berating BOSS'.⁵⁰⁷ James Roherty has claimed that Angola provided 'a meeting point for two agencies on a collision course'.⁵⁰⁸

⁴⁹⁸ Flower, *Serving Secretly*, p. 163. When a study by Arrie van Rensburg of Pretoria University (*The Tangled Web: Leadership and Change in Southern Africa*) alleged that van den Bergh had been 'strongly opposed to intervention because of his intimate knowledge of African opinion', Botha dismissed this as 'gossip aimed at breaking down the authority of the state': *Cape Times*, 22 June 1977.

⁴⁹⁹ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 16.

⁵⁰⁰ Hallett, 'The South African Intervention in Angola', p. 370.

⁵⁰¹ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 80.

⁵⁰² Spikes, *Angola and the Politics of Intervention*, p. 69.

⁵⁰³ Jaster, *The Defense of White Power*, p. 34. Vorster and van den Bergh had been interned together during WWII as members of the Ossewa-Brandwag. As Minister of Justice, Vorster had van den Bergh as Chief of the Security Police and on becoming Prime Minister he appointed him to a new post, head of the BOSS. The rivalry was heightened by speculation about Vorster's successor, as van den Bergh was a strong supporter of Connie Mulder, Botha's chief rival for the prime ministership.

⁵⁰⁴ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 9.

⁵⁰⁵ Frankel, *Pretoria's Praetorians*, p. 7; Grundy, *The Militarization of South African Politics*, p. 43. In the words of a former BOSS agent: 'The top men in Military Intelligence regarded themselves as "non-political purists" who were only interested in vital matters of defence. They despised van den Bergh's men as little peeping toms who crept around looking for people who disagreed with apartheid or Whites who slept with Blacks': Winter, *Inside BOSS*, p. 558.

⁵⁰⁶ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 8.

⁵⁰⁷ Flower, *Serving Secretly*, pp. 154, 156.

⁵⁰⁸ Roherty, *State Security in South Africa*, p. 73.

In 1980, General Malan, who had been Chief of the Army during Operation Savannah and was then the Minister of Defence, commented that, 'The events in Angola in 1975-76 focused the attention on the urgent necessity for the State Security Council to play a much fuller role in the national security of the Republic than hitherto.'⁵⁰⁹ Geldenhuys interpreted this statement as meaning that the Angolan debacle underlined the need in top government circles for regularised and formalised decision-making procedures. It was felt necessary to allow for the consideration of all relevant interests and to prevent decision-making, on matters of national interest, being usurped by a particular individual or agency in government.⁵¹⁰ Geldenhuys claimed that Malan's statement indicated that the State Security Council owed its character to 'an acknowledgement of the deficiencies and dangers involved in the military's dominance of decision-making on South Africa's involvement in the Angolan war'.⁵¹¹

The State Security Council (or Committee for National Security) had been in existence since 1972.⁵¹² Whereas under Vorster the SSC rarely met and tended to confine itself to narrowly defined security matters, its scope dramatically expanded during Botha's administration.⁵¹³ Under Botha the office of the prime minister was strengthened and reorganised, with Vorster's twenty ad hoc committees replaced by five permanent cabinet committees, the SSC being the only statutory body of these five.⁵¹⁴ The SSC sat at the apex of the National Security Management System, an intricate political-military apparatus devised by Botha and General Malan, to ensure bureaucratic cohesion under the prescriptions of 'total strategy'. The SSC's mandate was to advise the government on the 'formulation and implementation of national policy and strategy in relation to the security of the Republic'.⁵¹⁵ Botha chaired the council, which included the minister of defence, five other cabinet officers and the heads of the Defence Force, the police and the intelligence services.⁵¹⁶ In 1983, Geldenhuys claimed that the SSC and its substructures had become the most important elements of the decision-making process in South Africa.⁵¹⁷ When the SSC presented a recommendation to the cabinet for final approval, that recommendation effectively carried the prime minister's stamp of approval and, given the salience and urgency ascribed to security concerns, the SSC enjoyed a wide decision-making brief.⁵¹⁸ General A.J. van Deventer (who had commanded Operation Savannah) was appointed secretary to the SSC. Geldenhuys commented: 'That this key post has been

⁵⁰⁹ M. Malan, *Die Aanlag teen Suid-Afrika* (Institute for Strategic Studies, Pretoria, 1980), p. 14.

⁵¹⁰ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 93.

⁵¹¹ Ibid, p. 94.

⁵¹² P. O'Meara, 'South Africa's Contradictory Regional Goals', p. 219.

⁵¹³ D. Geldenhuys & H. Kotzé, 'Aspects of Political Decision-Making in South Africa', (*Politikon*, Vol. 10, No. 1, June 1983), p. 40.

⁵¹⁴ Seegers, 'Apartheid's Military: Its Origins and Development', p. 154.

⁵¹⁵ R. Schrire, *Adapt or Die: The End of White Politics in South Africa* (South Africa Update Series, Ford Foundation & Foreign Policy Association, New York, 1991), p. 38.

⁵¹⁶ Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 224.

⁵¹⁷ Geldenhuys & Kotzé, 'Aspects of Political Decision-Making', p. 33.

⁵¹⁸ Geldenhuys, *The Diplomacy of Isolation*, p. 92.

assigned to a professional soldier can hardly have been coincidental: not only some of the military's management methods but also its manpower has been drafted into top-level decision making'.⁵¹⁹

The role of the SSC in executive-level decision-making aroused considerable attention from both South African and overseas scholars.⁵²⁰ Most agreed that Botha's bureaucratic and cabinet-level reorganisation had deepened the trend towards administrative or executive government, a trend further accentuated by Botha's personal style.⁵²¹ The SSC was accused of being a form of inner cabinet, led by Botha.⁵²² Grundy likened it to the Politburo of the Soviet Communist party, the real decision-making body, with the cabinet, like the Soviet Council of Ministers, a rubber-stamp and policy-coordinating body.⁵²³ Because the SSC consisted mainly of men from the security establishment, the military was seen as being at the hub of the decision-making structure.⁵²⁴ The elevation of the SSC into a principal policy-making body reflected important features of Botha's leadership style: following the Angolan debacle in 1975-6 he wanted to formalise and regularise top-level decision-making; he placed a high premium on expert advice and he was familiar and comfortable with a forum that bore a distinct military imprint.⁵²⁵ General Malan has commented on Botha's ascension to the prime ministership: 'He was fairly involved in the military because, remember, he had the experience of Savannah and he learned the lessons that we did in Savannah and he applied them.'⁵²⁶ Annette Seegers has claimed that the Cabinet, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Parliament never recovered from the 'blow' of Operation Savannah as 'the hawks' took charge in

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, p. 93.

⁵²⁰ For a survey of the civil-military relations literature see: A. Seegers, 'The Military in South Africa: A Comparison and Critique', (*South Africa International*, Vol. 16, No. 4, April 1986), p. 193.

⁵²¹ Seegers, 'Apartheid's Military: Its Origins and Development', p. 154.

⁵²² Schrire, *Adapt or Die*, p. 38.

⁵²³ K. Grundy, *The Rise of the South African Security Establishment: An Essay on the Changing Locus of State Power* (Bradlow Series Paper No. 1, South African Institute of International Affairs, Johannesburg, 1983), p. 16.

⁵²⁴ Seegers, 'Apartheid's Military: Its Origins and Development', p. 154.

⁵²⁵ Geldenhuys, 'The Head of Government', p. 278.

⁵²⁶ Hamann, *Days of the Generals*, p. 53.

Pretoria: 'For about fifteen years decisions made on behalf of Total Onslaught would rarely rise above the treetops of the Operational Zone'.⁵²⁷

University of Cape Town

⁵²⁷ Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, pp. 212, 214, 216.

CONCLUSION

The Portuguese withdrawal from Angola and Mozambique led to a profound shift in the regional balance of power, changing the face of southern Africa. By 1975 the geopolitics of the Cold War brought an unexpected degree of internationalisation to the burgeoning civil war in Angola and incalculable suffering to the Angolan people. For South Africa, with its protective buffer rapidly crumbling, an insulated era of confidence was over. In 1975 Angola became an unlikely theatre of the Cold War. Pretoria's response was to invade Angola. It was South Africa's first military intervention in a black African state and one from which it was forced to retreat ignominiously.

The government attempted to keep news of the invasion from the South African people and employed a smoke screen of disinformation. It used the protection of its economic interests in Namibia and 'hot pursuits' of SWAPO guerrillas, deemed to be acceptable actions by the South African electorate, to dismiss any reports of greater South African penetration. When Pretoria finally admitted limited involvement in Angola, it sought to present this as a justifiable reaction to communist intervention. The National Party had long preached the dangers of the 'communist menace' to its white electorate. Despite Pretoria's claims to have simply responded to the Cuban presence, recent research in the Cuban archives has produced strong evidence that the South African intervention in Angola was the cause, and not the consequence, of Cuba's introduction of regular troops. By the time South African troops withdrew there were more than ten thousand Cuban troops engaged. This begs the question of why, if Pretoria was so strongly motivated by the Cuban threat, did it withdraw without ever mobilising the full might of the SADF, when the Cuban presence had increased dramatically? For its part, it appears that initially Soviet aid was limited and motivated as much by rivalry with the Chinese as with the West. The subsequent increase in Soviet weapons support and the introduction of large numbers of Cuban troops were probably not fully anticipated in Pretoria.

The truth about South Africa's motivations in Angola was only gradually revealed as the government became increasingly embittered at its perceived betrayal and evident international isolation. In 1975, Pretoria, which for so long had suffered a position of diplomatic isolation, found itself in the gratifying and unusual position of pursuing the same objective as several African states and the United States. Despite its convictions about communist aims for domination of southern Africa, the South African government would not have entered Angola without these two demonstrations of interest and apparent support. Angola was perceived as a chance to become integrated into Africa and a chance to strengthen South Africa's links with the West.

South Africa's Angolan intervention was perceived at the time as an aberration, an abandonment of its carefully constructed stance of non-interference in foreign states. This was seen to be in contrast to its

stance towards FRELIMO in Mozambique, where superficially at least, Vorster played his hand with studied correctness. However, paradoxical as it might sound, a key motivation for South Africa's involvement in Angola is found in the context of its government's policy of détente. Vorster saw in Operation Savannah an opportunity to prove to his detractors, both at home and abroad, the efficacy of his flagging outward policy. Intervention in Angola, alongside Zairean troops and at the urging of Zambia (and possibly the Ivory Coast and Senegal), was an opportunity to act in concert with moderate black Africa and to prove that South Africa was a reliable ally against communist expansion. It was a chance to respond to appeals from black Africa and to demonstrate that South Africa was willing to expend its lives and money for a common cause.

South Africa's invasion of Angola was also an effort to establish South Africa's credibility as a loyal ally of the 'Free World'. If South Africa did not intervene at the instigation of the West then it did so in the belief that it was embarking on a common struggle for which would receive due recognition. The United States claimed that there was no foreknowledge, military collusion or cooperation. South Africa claimed it had been 'left in the lurch'. Although exactly how any collaboration between South Africa and the United States developed remains murky, it is now clear that it did exist at a certain level. Such a firm conclusion is more difficult to reach with regard to instigation. In the absence of concrete evidence it is impossible to establish whether the South African government ever did receive a 'secret nod' from its United States counterpart, as its Pretoria's leaders insisted they had. The role of other Western powers in Angola is even less clear. France provided limited aid to the FNLA and the British government has been implicated in the recruitment of British mercenaries by the FNLA, even if simply in 'turning a blind eye'. For South Africa the prospect of a joint, or at least tacitly joint, campaign with the West was a golden opportunity and a risk worth taking. It was also a gross miscalculation.

The government in Pretoria miscalculated the international support the invasion would garner and underestimated the political liability its allegiance represented abroad. Vorster did not appear to understand the enormity of the risks involved and displayed an astounding naivety with regard to South Africa's true international standing. He misread both the degree and nature of African support for South African intervention; private nods and winks from a handful of African leaders did not represent meaningful or practical support. When the initiative became mired in a rising tide of criticism against South Africa's intervention, there was no African support to be found. The targets of Pretoria's wooing through détente were not prepared to risk the wrath of black Africa by standing by the white oppressor. Pretoria's belief that the interests of the West coincided with those of South Africa and its expectation that Western (particularly American) support would be forthcoming, although perhaps correct on the first count, proved woefully out of touch on the second. Although American involvement remained clandestine and low level, Vorster and Botha apparently believed that it represented a firm policy commitment by the Ford Administration. South Africa failed to see that southern Africa was only a small part of the international global scheme of American politics. The government had become a victim of its own propaganda. In seeking to persuade the

world that South Africa was of strategic importance to the Free World, and too important to be sidelined as the pariah of Africa, it seems Vorster had convinced only himself. Vorster and his advisers critically misjudged the mood in the United States. It would have been politically impossible for Ford to have openly endorsed the South African invasion and, after its humiliation in Vietnam, the American public, was certainly not going to condone the sending of American soldiers to another distant Third World battlefield. Such a reaction might logically have been anticipated in Pretoria.

The United States congressional mandate against continued American involvement and Pretoria's failure to win either Western or African endorsement for its intervention in Angola, left South Africa in an exposed position. As the scope of the SADF's involvement became known, the government found itself alone and facing international condemnation. The news also cast a different light on the three Angolan movements. In presenting South Africa as an aggressive military power, the Angola adventure squandered the successes of détente. South Africa had displayed a total disregard for the realities of African politics, underestimating the emotional hostility to South Africa from within black Africa. Pretoria's intervention had a convulsive effect among African countries, overriding anxieties related to Soviet and Cuban intervention. Africans had more experience of racism than of communism and, in the eyes of many African states; South Africa's involvement legitimised the assistance given to the MPLA by the Soviets and Cubans. Support for the MPLA was galvanized and UNITA and the FNLA were discredited as legitimate claimants to power in Angola. Thus, in the diplomatic arena, Pretoria helped to bring about the very situation it had sought to prevent.

The Angolan conflict thus underscored the extent of Pretoria's diplomatic and political vulnerabilities. A conservative American administration had abandoned South Africa when broader security and political interests were at stake. Furthermore the fear of being associated with apartheid had been a key factor in the cessation of American aid to the Angolan movements. In light of this, Pretoria's assertions that it represented the front line for the West against the encroachment of communism in Africa appeared threadbare. South Africa was not as important to the West as it had believed itself to be. With hindsight it seems almost impossible to believe that Pretoria imagined that the invasion of a sovereign state would enhance South Africa's standing in black Africa and restore South Africa to its position within the Western alliance. It was a futile search for friends and security in a hostile and increasingly threatening world. It was a gamble that left Pretoria still more isolated. In Parliament the Opposition stressed the loneliness of South Africa's Angolan intervention: 'The bitterest moment of all came in Angola, because when we waited for friends to turn up, no one responded; not a single White one and not one Black one. What greater evidence of isolation could there have been than that? When in a crucial situation you stand alone, that is isolation.'¹

¹ J.D. du P. Basson, Republic of South Africa, *House of Assembly Debates*, 26 April 1976, col. 5378.

Whereas the debate over South Africa's entry into the First and Second World Wars exacerbated communal cleavages both between English- and Afrikaans-speakers and within the Afrikaner community itself, with regard to the white electorate the government survived its Angolan intervention with surprisingly little public outcry and no evident political casualties. In contrast to the United States where the CIA's Angolan activities were the subject of congressional enquiries and debate, in South Africa the parliamentary challenge to the government was muted. The boundaries of political debate in the press and parliament lay well within the dominant white consensus. Criticism from both sources was based on the premise that the government's information strategy had a corrosive effect on public morale and consequently on national security. It was argued that the national interest would have been better served by allowing public debate on the issues involved. There remained a unity of purpose, a fundamental agreement and commitment to common goals, between the government and its opponents in the white opposition press and political establishment. It was accepted that black Marxist revolutionary movements in southern Africa and Angola endangered South Africa's interests and had to be resisted.

'Operation Savannah' starkly revealed the true nature of official information practices and the concomitant impotence of the South African press to inform their public about a matter as momentous as the invasion of a neighbouring country by South African forces. It also illustrated that the government felt little compulsion to be accountable to its constituents, to Parliament or to the public at large. That Vorster decided on and executed such a major policy initiative without consulting the full Cabinet or drawing on the full range of relevant government departments is also illustrative of the domestic configurations of power. If the *basis* for deciding to intervene in Angola was seriously flawed, so too was the *process* by which that and subsequent decisions were made. The Angolan intervention revealed profound deficiencies in South Africa's top-level decision-making. The various interested parties within the executive branch of government had unequal opportunities for making their views known and there was no system of inter-departmental checks and balances.

A new mood, engendered by the triumph of FRELIMO and then the MPLA in a situation analogous to their own, gave encouragement and hope to the Nationalist government's internal opponents, helping to precipitate widespread black defiance. Within three months of the Defence Force's withdrawal from Angola, the country was struck by the first massive black protests since the 1960s. The government itself was forced to acknowledge that events in Angola, particularly the perceived defeat of the SADF by black Angolans, could have led to a hardening of black attitudes internally and provided an impetus to the revolt. The urban uprising provided a glimpse of the forces for change gradually gathering strength within South African society.

South Africa's regional position was further weakened after the Angola debacle by an escalation of SWAPO military activity in Namibia. In contrast to the SADF's claims that its troops entered Angola in

order to counter SWAPO, South Africa's intervention in fact allowed SWAPO to increase its activity in northern Namibia. The border war began in earnest in the wake of Operation Savannah. Pretoria had failed to block the MPLA's ascension to power and that government now gave support and sanctuary to SWAPO guerrillas. SWAPO was now in a position to receive a much greater volume of support than ever before from both the Cubans and Soviets. South Africa's involvement in Angola also weakened its government's international stance on Namibia by buttressing accusations that it was illegally occupying Namibia and using it as a military base, contrary to international agreements.

For Pretoria, Angola came to epitomise the perceived 'total onslaught'. However, South Africa's intervention, by removing the risk of united African opposition, had in fact opened the way to increased communist intervention in Angola and in turn provided an opportunity for greater Russian involvement in Namibia and Rhodesia. In this sense, for South Africa, the total onslaught was a self-fulfilling prophecy. The fact that South Africa's objectives were not achieved in Angola did not weaken the military's position in the ensuing debate about the future direction of regional strategy. Instead the decision to invade Angola marked the start of the military's ascendancy in foreign policy.

Undertaken in order to achieve political goals, Pretoria's military operation in Angola had not possessed an advance masterplan. By contrast, the Defence Force was drawn into an incremental escalation with no clearly obtainable political objective or end-point. According to the subsequent Minister of Defence, Magnus Malan, South Africa's involvement in the Angolan conflict was a key factor influencing the subsequent development of the government's top-level decision-making structure, a structure in which the military was to assume increasing importance. The government's participation in the Angolan civil war induced a dramatic shift in the balance of power in southern Africa, marking a deterioration in both South Africa's relations with the West and its external security situation. As the *Cape Times* commented on 31 January 1976: 'After Angola, things will never be the same again in South Africa'.

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<i>Die Afrikaner</i>	<i>Die Burger</i>	<i>Die Transvaler</i>
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INTERVIEWS

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- Jan D. Breytenbach 26 October 2001
- Kent Durr Telephone interview, 21 July 2002
- H. de V. du Toit Telephone interview, 22 July 2002
- Henri Geyser Telephone interview, 1 November 2000
- Helmoed-Römer Heitman 14 October 2000
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- Gerald Shaw 1 November 2000
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